Rolling Stone
UK
DECEMBER/JANUARY 2024
ISSUE 014

## HYUNJIN
THE STRAY KIDS STAR ON DONATELLA, DUA, TROYE AND TAYLOR

## THE LIBERTINES
WHY THE STATE OF THE WORLD AND SOBRIETY INSPIRED NEW MUSIC

# OZZY OSBOURNE
HOW THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS DEFIED THE ODDS AND FOUND HAPPINESS

## THE AWARDS ISSUE

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THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
THE LAST DINNER PARTY
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PARTISAN RECORDS
PINKPANTHERESS
DANIEL KALUUYA
LEWIS CAPALDI
MAISIE PETERS
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JESSIE WARE
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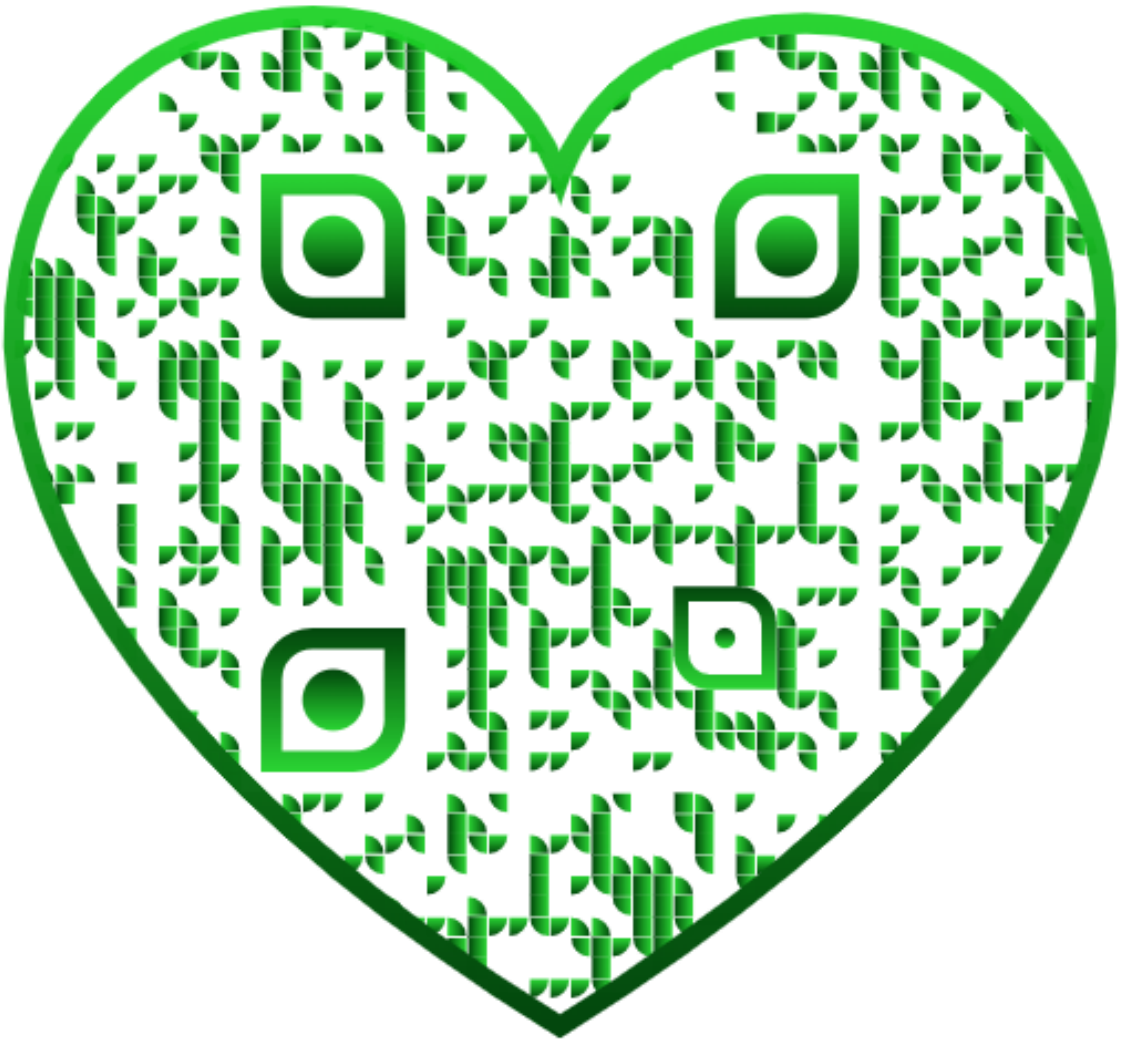

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# DANIEL KALUUYA

THE ACTOR-WRITER-DIRECTOR ON THE KITCHEN, HIS MOST PERSONAL FILM YET

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# MAISIE PETERS

WHEN THE GOOD WITCH CAST A SPELL ON THE MUSIC WORLD...

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FEATURING ADAM MELCHOR WITH THE HIGHWAY SERIES DREADNOUGHT IN SPRUCE

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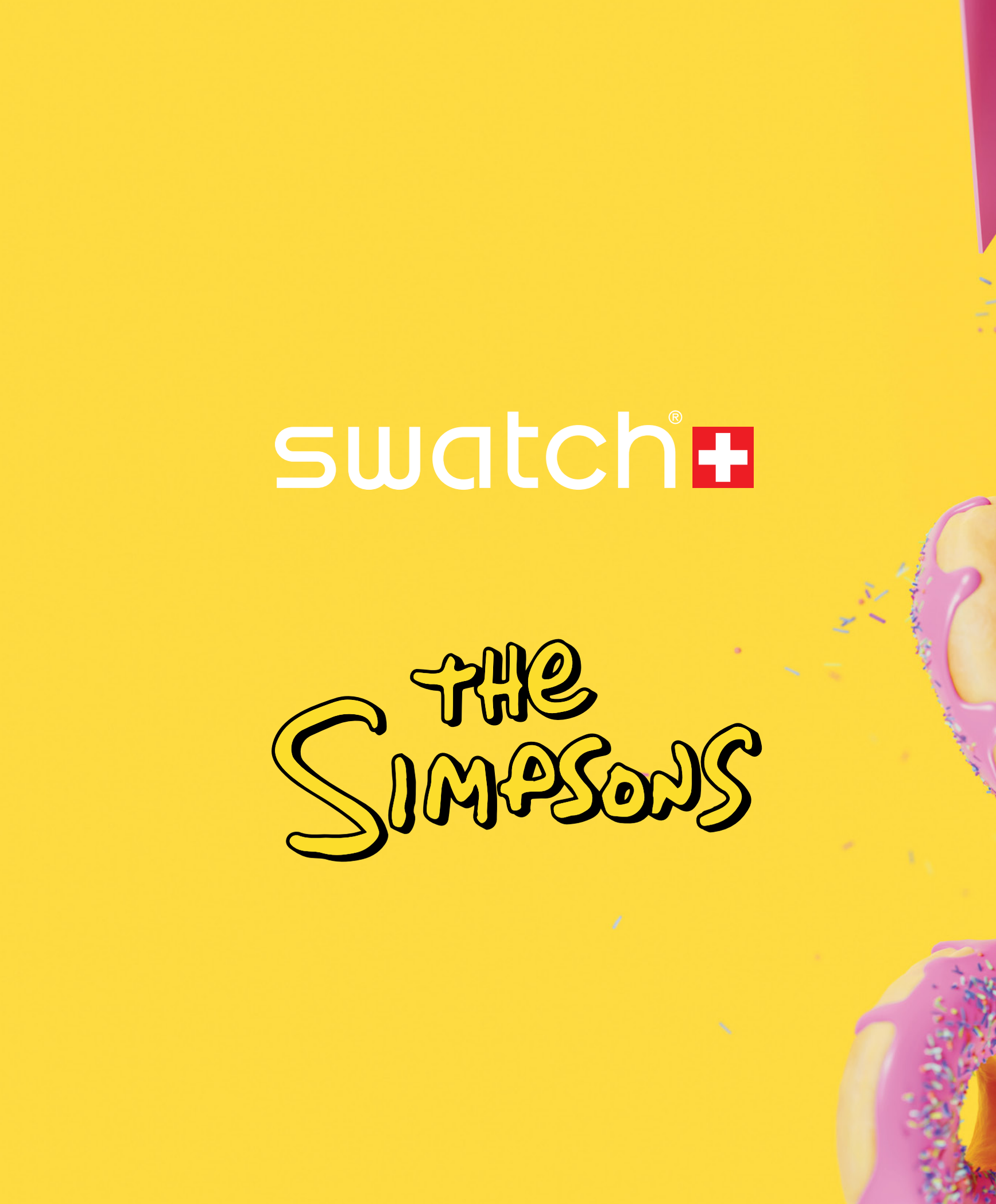

swatch
SWISS
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"If I can perform again, I will"
Ozzy Osbourne

PHOTOGRAPH BY Danielle Levitt

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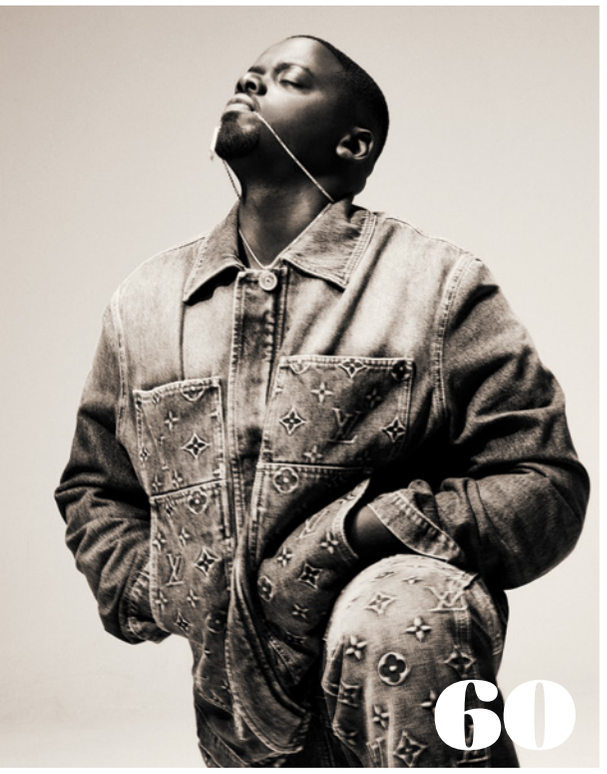

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DANNY KASIRYE; LEWIS VORN

VOLVO

# Small has hit the big time

## The fully electric Volvo **EX30**.
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# Editor's Letter

## Celebrating British talent

TIME FLIES, AS they say... It feels like in the short two years since we launched the print and digital magazine, Rolling Stone UK has more than just arrived – we've made ourselves at home. During our second year of publishing, our cover stars have included Ncuti Gatwa, Kylie, PinkPantheress, Cillian Murphy, Leigh-Anne, Munya Chawawa, Fredo, Loyle Carner, Niall Horan and Sam Smith... and some up-and-coming US artist by the name of Lana Del Rey. After a strong first year, we had even more to prove.

Away from our cover stars, we also debuted the Rolling Stone UK Awards in November 2022 that were celebrated in the printed magazine and rolled out digitally. So, how to go bigger in 2023? By staging our first in-person Awards event, of course. By the time you read this, the Awards will have taken place at the iconic Roundhouse in Camden, London, held in collaboration with our friends at Rémy Martin and featuring an array of talent and exceptional creators with performances by Louis Tomlinson, The Last Dinner Party and Kenya Grace. Please do check out the Rolling Stone UK page on YouTube and @RollingStoneUK across all social channels for the highlights.

It's only with the support of our partners at Rémy Martin alongside Volvo, Visit West Hollywood, Brooklands Studio and Moving Venue that we were able to lay the foundation stone for what will be the annual in-person Rolling Stone UK Awards. So, to our wonderful sponsors, we say very loudly: "Cheers! Thanks a lot!"

Because there is a lot to celebrate. In recorded music, the UK is the second largest exporter of music after only the US. Not bad for such a small island, eh? It's an impressive feat worth championing. As such, with the Rolling Stone UK Awards, we aim to create a platform to uplift just some of the many incredible voices coming from our boisterous corner of the globe. Across the UK there is a wealth of talent to pick from, but at the heart of each of our award-winners is more than just the unquestionable talent. In true Rolling Stone fashion, there's a story, a commanding narrative that separated our final award-winners from all the other brilliant creators that filled our nominations list.

In a world so fraught with hate and fear, the work of all these UK-based artists flourishes with a beauty and elegance so unique in all the multitudinous forms it manifests, and it shines with defiant pride. Our stories and successes are enriched by the diversity of voices and minds that make our nation great. It really is no wonder why the UK is one of the leaders in music, film and television on the global stage, with others looking to us for inspiration and for a measure which they aim to equal or surpass.

As part of the creative industry, I am immeasurably proud at how Rolling Stone UK has established itself. It hasn't been easy. While we wear the brand name of Rolling Stone and carry the mighty heritage of our US partner, we are still an independently published magazine in the UK and Ireland, doing our own thing and following our own vision. In a post-Covid, post-Brexit, post-Liz Truss economy, we have created this space to celebrate art. Finally, I'd like to say a great big thank-you to **you** for joining us on this journey.

**CLIFF JOANNOU**
**EDITOR IN CHIEF**

### ON THE COVERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE LEVITT

FASHION DIRECTION AND CREATIVE DIRECTION BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN

STYLING BY KATJA CAHILL

OZZY WEARS SHIRT, TROUSERS, COAT AND OVERCOAT BY DOLCE & GABBANA, NECKLACES BY CHROME HEARTS, RINGS BY ROCKFORD COLLECTION, BRACELETS BY LUIS MORAIS, WATCH BY CARTIER, HOLDING CANE BY FASHIONABLE CANES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANNY KASIRYE

CREATIVE DIRECTION AND STYLING BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN

DANIEL WEARS COAT BY MAISON VALENTINO, SHIRT BY MR P AT MR PORTER, TIE BY VALENTINO GARAVANI, RING, DANIEL'S OWN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEWIS VORN

FASHION AND CREATIVE DIRECTION BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN

STYLING BY LUCI ELLIS

MAISIE WEARS TOP, SKIRT AND SHOES BY SHUSHU/TONG, SOCKS BY RAEY

SHOT ON LOCATION AT BROOKLANDS STUDIO, WEYBRIDGE

# Contributors

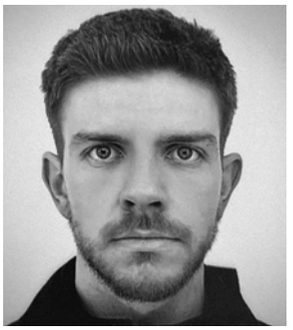
## INSIDE THE COVERS

### Danielle Levitt
Photographer

I loved Ozzy before we shot together, but after being on set with him, I only loved him more. This is a man in his seventies who uses a Sharpie to fill in chips in his black nail polish. He cherishes his family, adores his many small dogs, and looks incredible in fashion — because he's the consummate showman, and he knows it's all a show. He has lived such a full life, but he's still earnest, introspective and raw — even after all these years.

### Danny Kasirye
Photographer

I've loved TV and film since before I ever picked up a camera, so I believe that contributed to my inclination towards photographing actors! Daniel Kaluuya is someone I've admired for years. I've always wanted to shoot him, and I've been lucky enough to do so twice now. It's easy working with him as we're both very similar people — we're both Ugandan, and there aren't many of us working in the entertainment/ creative industries.



### Lewis Vorn
Photographer

Being obsessed with pop stars and magazines is what made me want to become a photographer. Working with Maisie Peters, who'd literally just sold out Wembley, was a huge milestone for me. The whole team were amazing and brought a lot of energy to the set. Also, Maisie was the easiest person to collaborate with! She's super intuitive and calm, and the whole shoot just felt very fun and laidback. We listened to Girls Alouds' greatest hits and then took some pictures.

### Corrina Antrobus
Journalist

"If it's not a 'Fuck, yeah,' it's a 'Hell, no,'" is a Daniel Kaluuya life hack I came across when researching this edition's star. If I had been more familiar with editor Cliff, I would have certainly replied "Fuck, yeah" when invited to do this interview. Using a motto I've had to adopt now I'm in the windtunnel of new motherhood, I asked myself, 'Will I tell my kid about this?' He may only be 17 months old now, but I'll bet that by the time he's old enough to understand what a cultural icon is, he'll be proud to say that Daniel Kaluuya gave his mum the last chicken wing.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# Blue heaven

Is any fabric more enduring — in both literal and trend terms — than denim? Originally starting out as workwear, it was quickly discovered by luxury fashion houses. This season, Dior Men's creative director Kim Jones has created an original capsule collection called Dior Denim. Exploring the architectural essence of the timeless blue cloth, it consists of several pieces, including jeans and shirts made from eco-friendly cotton, in shades ranging from indigo to grey and black. They're understated, considered and, thanks to the Dior treatment, sure to stay in style.

**DIOR.COM**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK CANT; STYLING AND WORDS BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN; MODEL: KIT PRICE AT IMG; HAIR & MAKEUP BY MAYA CZARNIECKA USING AESOP; FASHION ASSISTANT: AARON PANDHER

# One sound doesn't fit all

It's a little-known fact that we all hear differently, so it makes sense that our music-listening experience should be personally designed to take this into account. This is the USP of the new Denon PerL and Denon PerL Pro earbuds, priced from £189. Using Masimo Adaptive Acoustic Technology, they measure your hearing to create your very own sound profile. This then shapes your music to deliver audio that's specially adapted for your ear, revolutionising the way you hear music. Offering superior, faithful audio quality as well as six-hour battery life (eight for the PerL Pro) and customisable touch controls, these earbuds provide the ultimate listening experience. Sounds good to us.

**DENON.COM**

# Take a hike

With Clarks' new ATL Hike GTX (Gore-Tex) boots, you'll be ready for anything — whether you're exploring the countryside or pounding city pavements. Their Durable Rock™ rubber soles offer maximum grip, while the cleated Mimic Grip™ technology provides superior traction, helping you to conquer every kind of terrain. The women's ATL Hike Top Gore-Tex and the men's ATL Hike Hi (Gore-Tex) boots (both pictured) deliver optimum comfort thanks to ultra-cushioning EVA footbeds, and they come in earthy tones, so that whether you're hiking or shopping, you can do it in style.

**CLARKS.COM**

ATL HIKE TOP (GORE-TEX), IVORY WARMLINED, £160, AND ATL HIKE HI (GORE-TEX) IN DARK GREY, £160, BY CLARKS

# Melting point

In the darkness of the modern world, we're all seeking out emojis, memes and uplifting videos of dogs for a welcome shot of, let's be honest, overwhelming cuteness.

Yet this defining quality is often hard to pin down. That's what Somerset House will try to do with Cute, a new exhibition which aims to examine the world's fondness for cute culture and how it has become an influential reflection of our times.

As well as a display of all the items we adore (dedicated plushie space, check!), there are contributions from artists such as Hannah Diamond (pictured) and an immersive visual and sonic music installation featuring a curated collection of videos from the likes of SOPHIE, Charli XCX and A.G. Cook. Now, that's cute.

**SOMERSETHOUSE.ORG.UK**

HANNAH DIAMOND. AFFIRMATIONS. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

# Doin' it for themselves

Calling all 'Typical' and Rebel Grrrls! Until April 2024 at Tate Britain, Women in Revolt! presents two decades of radical feminist ideas set against a backdrop of social, economic and political change.

Spanning punk and protest and ending with the collapse of the Thatcher regime, this celebration of women's enduring struggle to be heard and their invaluable contribution to British culture is explored through paintings, photography, collage and much more. Featuring more than 100 female artists working in the UK, this is the first exhibition of its kind — don't miss it.

**TATE.ORG.UK**

CAROLINE COON, THE SLITS, POST HOUSE HOTEL, CARDIFF, JUNE 1977. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

# Purple reign

Technical complexity and intricacy are at the heart of Swiss Haute Horlogerie manufacturer Audemars Piguet's creations. Ever the perfectionists, they've revisited the proportions of their Code 11.59 by Audemars Piguet timepiece. Its new 38mm, 18-carat pink gold case — specially designed for smaller wrists — features three intricate parts and is available in two self-winding models which each retail at £29,700. Choose from two elegant colourways of purple (pictured) or ivory, with a matching alligator strap.

**AUDEMARSPIGUET.COM**

FILA.CO.UK

# The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

# On the outside, looking in

*Crafting stories out of other people's lives and embracing a new, classic Americana sound, Gia Ford is emerging as a unique and timeless artist* ➔

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Melanie Lehmann**

"I FIND IT REALLY boring to write about myself," says Gia Ford. Instead, the singer and songwriter uses her songs to dive deep into the stories of others, embellishing them and adding her own perspective but using external narratives as her jumping-off point.

Signing to Dirty Hit for 2020 debut EP *Murder in the Dark*, Ford made dark alt-pop filled with 808s and electronic-leaning sonics. Lurking in the background, though, was a lifelong love of Americana and sweeping rock soundscapes, and when she parted with the label due to creative differences and went independent, this facet of her artistry came to the fore.

On recent singles from her debut album, due out in mid-2024, she uses literature as a springboard from which to explore others' stories. This is best shown on new single 'Falling in Love Again', which tells the story of her friend's father, who mourned the death of his wife by asking his new partner to dress up in her clothes. "That's so uncomfortable, but also really beautiful and sad," she reflects of the story. "It's about those strange ways that people grieve, and how they aren't often very comfortable to talk about [them]. He was trying to express something, and he didn't know how to do it. It just leaked out into life the way these things do."

This bold and multi-faceted world that Ford creates is also enriched by her co-writers, who bring different perspectives to the stories. "I wish I could just write something completely alone," she says, "but I think there's something really amazing about writing with other people because you have so many different perspectives on something. We learn about life through writing songs with other people as well. It's not just about the song, it's about the relationship that you have with those people."

This songwriting style is intimately linked to – and significantly enhanced by – the sonic direction she is now travelling in. On 'Falling in Love Again', the story of the grieving widower is given space to make its impact accompanied by sparse and luscious piano licks and woozy guitar. "A lot of the stories that I'm drawn to require a big open sky and big open space," she says of her new sonic palette, which recalls Fleetwood Mac, Joni Mitchell and her new labelmate on Chrysalis Records, Laura Marling. "It's hard to describe, but it's that vastness of sound that I like."

This particular sound was enhanced by recording her album in Los Angeles at the famous Sound City Studios, where Fleetwood Mac first met. "It felt like I was surrounded by the spirits of all these people," says Ford, smiling. While there she also visited Laurel Canyon, a place with a distinctive and legendary musical vibe that Ford taps into on her new material.

Her upcoming debut album, though not

written as such, has ended up as something of a concept album, as Ford explains. “Every song is about an outsider of some kind. Every character is an outsider. If it’s a song about me, it’s because I also felt separate from something. I haven’t even fully deciphered it for myself yet, but there’s a reason why I’m drawn to that theme. Everyone feels separate from something, don’t they? You live life in your own head, even though we’re all living the same thing. You do feel inherently separate from the world. You’re the main character because you’re the only one that can experience your consciousness.”

If Ford does sing of her own life, it’s through heavy metaphor, such as on new single

**“I’m telling everyone else’s stories. I think I’m afraid of writing about myself. I’m more comfortable pretending to be other people”**

‘Alligator’, a driving soft rock hit which sees her refer to herself through parallel beings in the animal kingdom. “I wanted to embody them, so I didn’t talk directly about myself. That song’s about trying really hard to get my music noticed on TikTok and just generally in the world. I was getting frustrated at how difficult it was. I felt like I was doing everything correctly, but no one was noticing it or recognising all the work that I had put in.” In keeping with her distinct and unique lyrical expression, she chose to approach the topic from a metaphorical perspective.

This personal detachment and character-led style is also seen in the singer’s – real name Molly McCormick – artist moniker. “To me, Gia Ford is a narrator. Maybe that will change and maybe she’ll be just me, but I’m an observer. It’s from my perspective, but I’m telling everyone else’s stories.” She then pauses for a second, before deciding: “I think I’m afraid of writing about myself. I’m more comfortable pretending to be other people.” **WILL RICHARDS**

# RS RECOMMENDS

**STAY ON TRACK WITH OUR PICK OF THE LATEST ONES TO WATCH**

## Kelvin Krash

On debut album *HARSH*, British rapper and producer Kelvin Krash delivers a singular voice that shows why he's become a fast favourite of A$AP Rocky — who features on the record — and other leading lights of music. Here, club-primed synths mix with deeper lyrical moments to create an album that effortlessly shows off his talent.

## Chinchilla

DIY provocateur Chinchilla has already made a bold impact in 2023. Her breakthrough single 'Little Girl Gone' was released in April and has racked up a staggering 200 million streams and 14 million combined video views, securing her spot as the first UK female soloist ever to top Billboard's Emerging Artists chart. "I didn't want the lyrics to be glamorous, I wanted to draw up chaos," says Chinchilla of the track's defiant spirit.

## Big Special

Modern life can be relentlessly bleak, but few are dissecting the misery quite like Big Special. The West Midlands duo offer razor-sharp lyrics, soulful interludes and relentless synths to reflect the reality that many of us are going through.

Of recent single 'Desperate Breakfast', lead singer Joe Hicklin says: "It's about that first meal of the day you have to force down before you drag yourself to the job you don't want in the place you don't want to be."

## Chartreuse

Armed with the emotionally charged sensibilities of indie stalwarts such as The National and Radiohead, Londoners Chartreuse provide brooding and often intense tunes that tackle the state of the modern world. A recent highlight comes in 'All Seeing All the Time', an ode to the information overload that defines the 21st century.

## Chrissi

Over the past few years, Chrissi has emerged as one of the most charismatic voices in new British R&B, with the Essex-based singer writing charming lyrics over smooth, syrupy instrumentation. Her latest single 'Love Me in Chapters', though, ushers in a new, confessional era. On it, she strips things back to just a vocoder, acoustic guitar and devastatingly potent lyrics, pointing towards a future of naked honesty to match her undeniable talent.

## HONESTY

The latest band to come off the always-excellent Partisan Records production line, HONESTY are a Leeds quartet who draw from ambient, electronic and dance music with an intriguing, exploratory nature. Of their pair of debut singles, 'U&I' is the highlight, with Imi Holmes's manipulated vocals sitting on top of glitchy beats reminiscent of Radiohead's 'Kid A'. The other track, 'Tune In Tune Out', is slower and more menacing.

## mary in the junkyard

On debut single 'Tuesday', Londoners mary in the junkyard go far in proving why they're one of the capital's most hotly tipped bands. The understated vocals of singer Clari Freeman-Taylor give the track a subtle start before the arrival of flitting drumbeats allow the track to head to a more manic place.

## Say Now

Put the word out: Say Now are on a path that might just lead them to become your next favourite girl group. The three-piece are funny (they started without a name, asked fans to decide and went by the brilliant moniker needanamebro in the meantime), and their anthems are loved by everyone from Jack Harlow to All Saints.

## Yasmin Hass

You'd do well to get your debut single produced by a duo that includes The 1975's Ross MacDonald, before getting the thumbs-up for said track from none other than Florence Pugh. But that's exactly what Yasmin Hass has managed to achieve on 'Cleo', a brilliantly powerful meditation on mid-twenties womanhood. "This song is about being utterly in love, whilst also wondering, how much freedom do I have left?" she says.

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TV

# Heirs and graces

***Actor Ed McVey has gone from class clown to* The Crown *as he makes his debut playing Prince William as a teenager and a young man in the Netflix hit. Luckily, he likes the spotlight, as he tells Rolling Stone UK***

**By ANNA SMITH**

ED MCVEY LIKES attention, though he's a bit sheepish about it. "I feel like you're not allowed to say you enjoy being looked at." But it's a trait that will serve him well in his new role as Prince William in *The Crown*. All eyes are now on the 24-year-old, who recently made his TV debut playing the future king from his teens onwards.

A south Devon boy, McVey is chatty and confident, and fired up that he can finally talk about playing the future king in Netflix's smash-hit series. He didn't initially fancy his chances of getting the part. "It was one of those things where you do the tape, but you're fully aware that everyone and their blond-haired, blue-eyed brother is going to be putting in for Will, so it's a bit of a long shot."

After an audition, McVey was invited to join a table read with Meg Bellamy, who was later cast as Kate Middleton. "It was the first time I met Meg. You could feel electricity in the air, which I wasn't expecting." Producers were impressed, but it took a while for the good news to be confirmed. "My mum was ripping her hair out!" says McVey.

Growing up on a farm, McVey was far from thespian influence. "My mum works as a pharmacist, and my dad has just retrained as a counsellor," he says. He describes his childhood as "fantastic – lots of dogs, animals, grass, fresh air. It was anything you could ever want really in a childhood. Just having space to muck around, set things on fire. You know, all the good stuff." It was McVey's teachers who encouraged him to get into theatre, which resulted in him moving to London when he was 16 to attend arts college. "I think they saw this hyperactive, class clown energy. I enjoyed making people laugh and also the attention. I think I felt seen or something. I still do."

Having a brother helped McVey get into the role of Will. "I'm the younger brother, which is interesting. Older brothers have this way of

STYLING: HOLLY WHITE AT THE WALL GROUP;
GROOMING: PETRA SELIGE AT THE WALL GROUP

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Joseph Sinclair**

**PRINCE CHARMING**
McVey's resemblance to the future king helped him bag the role

**"I enjoyed making people laugh and also the attention. I think I felt seen or something"**

managing to say that one thing that just really gets under your skin. So, I think having that influence and also having the bond that you have with your younger or older brother – that was really important, to be able to replicate that with Luther [Ford, who plays Harry]."

His face lights up when we discuss the clothing from the series. "The costumes are probably the most important bit for me. I come in with William when he's about 16, 17, and I go to 24, 25, and the clothes are so important in marking his age." The looks included "really awkward, oversized trousers and clunky shoes" that really helped him to get into character. "I wanted him going from an innocent little boy who wants to sort of not be there, to a man who knows who he is and knows what he's going to be and is present."

William's taste in music was also explored when McVey was researching the part. "He's a big hip-hop fan, which is really cool. I'm such a massive Eminem fan. And the show has got incredible music. It's got such a pulse, a youthful energy."

McVey seems very close to the role, talking about his character in the first person as he describes his favourite scene. "I'm celebrating my 18th birthday and doing quite a lot of drinking. And then there is this harsh cut to the start of a press conference the morning after, and I'm looking severely hungover... I'm peering through this crack, watching the cameras and all these men set up their microphones. And me and Luther are just like, hanging, and I'm particularly in an awful, awful state. It's a very funny, very perfectly edited cut of a party, and what you want life to be, and then the reality of being who you are."

McVey lives close to the river in London, with his partner, who's a writer-director. Is it useful that they're in the same business? "Yes, she's helpful with scripts and everything." As for life after *The Crown*, McVey is keeping his options open, thinking about animation, motion capture and using his knack for accents. "Ideally, I don't want to be playing another prince straightaway," he says. Whatever happens, one thing seems likely: people will still be watching him. And it's OK for him to like that.

MUSIC

# All by myself

***Kenya Grace has topped the UK chart with 'Strangers', a dance smash created alone in her bedroom. Rolling Stone UK meets the singer aiming to outlast her viral moment...***

HANNAH DIAMOND

KENYA GRACE ENTERED an elite club of just two when her single 'Strangers' hit the top of the UK singles chart in October. The track became just the second song entirely written and produced by a British female solo artist to hit number one. The other person to have achieved this feat? Kate Bush.

The song is a smouldering account of being ghosted on dating apps, set over skittering production that draws from garage, dubstep and dance. "*How can we say that this is love when it goes like this?*" she sings, speaking to society at large while sharing her specific experience. Since its release, it has also gone to the top of the Billboard Dance/Electronic Songs chart, the first track entirely produced and performed by a woman to ever do so.

'Strangers', as with every Kenya Grace song so far, was written and recorded entirely in her Hampshire bedroom, where she first started making music as a teenager. Inspired by the likes of Flume, Disclosure and AlunaGeorge, she used a mix of her natural intuition and YouTube tutorials to become a master of music software package Logic. "I do like working on my own, to be honest, and I will probably always at least make the first demo of any song by myself," she explains from Paris, where she is halfway through her first-ever tour.

After Grace pieces together tunes in her bedroom – chords often come first, with a beat next and then lyrics on top – she has tended to release them quickly and without a second thought. 'Strangers' hit the internet just a month after it was written. "I hate making people wait!" she smiles. "I love being free with [my] socials and, like, just posting stuff, whatever it is that I make that week. 'Strangers' came out really fast, which was great.

"It's been the craziest thing that's ever happened to me," she says, reflecting on the tune's success, "and the best thing as well. It's just been insane – I'm very grateful." On her debut tour, she's seen the real-life manifestation of this success. "Sometimes people on Instagram and TikTok don't feel like actual people, so when you meet them in real life, it feels a lot more real."

As well as her formative electronic influences, Grace is a musical peer of PinkPantheress. There are also plenty of similarities to the conversational, charismatic songwriting of Lily Allen in her work. Asked whether she considers herself primarily a producer, songwriter or both, Grace shrugs and plays down the importance of labels. The two terms feel equally applicable, though; her songs are far from just lyrics put on top of beats, and the tracks could have their dance-led dressing removed and stand strong as stripped-back, singer-songwriter tunes.

Following 'Strangers' is the ecstatic new single 'Only in My Mind', a track even catchier and more immediate than the chart-topper. With the promise of a bigger body of work on the way, it shows the next steps of an artist interested in building longevity, not simply a viral moment.

As for the future, Grace is contemplating moving out of home and entertains ideas of collaboration and studio-based work. Despite these doors now being open to her, she feels drawn back to her comfortable and creatively stimulating origins, and there's something irreplaceable and special about the songs being created purely inside the mind – and bedroom – of this intriguing new voice in British music.

WILL RICHARDS

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MUSIC

# Putting us in the picture

*In the middle of their first tour, emerging south London band Picture Parlour fill us in on dealing with criticism and when fans can expect their debut album*

By NICK REILLY

**PICTURE THIS** (From left) Sian Lynch, Michael Nash, Katherine Parlour and Ella Risi

AT THE START of 2023, Picture Parlour were playing shows at Brixton's The Windmill, the influential south London venue where the likes of Shame, Black Midi and Black Country, New Road all honed their craft before bigger things beckoned.

But now the buzzy south Londoners find themselves in a very different position entirely. Their debut single 'Norwegian Wood' arrived in June and saw the group winning praise for the way it offered a modern and atmospheric take on classic rock stylings.

Still, it wasn't all plain sailing. When Picture Parlour was interviewed by this very magazine, among other titles, faceless online critics accused the group of being industry plants – a vague phrase that's been used as an unfair stick with which to beat bands with brilliant debut singles.

Picture Parlour's latest, 'Judgement Day', sees them continue that sensational hot streak. Here, the band's lead singer Katherine Parlour and guitarist Ella Risi tell us their story so far.

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**We're speaking midway through your tour with The Last Dinner Party. It feels like a coming together of two of the year's most hotly tipped bands.**

**Parlour:** We're just so excited to be on the road with a band like that. Them and their crew have really looked after us every night, and I know I just said it on stage, but to see them every night and watch what they do is nothing short of inspiring.

**Risi:** I know that like a squad we'd stay and watch them for the first night, but we've been out there watching the show every single night because we genuinely enjoy watching them so much.

**This is your first ever tour. Have you had to lay down any strict rules to cope with life in a tour van?**

**Parlour:** Socks on! We've tried to keep a tidy space where cowboy boots are firmly in the back and as far away from people's nostrils as possible.

**Risi:** Don't party too hard the night before shows – but sadly we haven't always followed that. But it's all right because when you're on stage for those 30 minutes, it cures you. You come off and you're feeling much better.

**The last time we spoke, your debut single 'Norwegian Wood' hadn't come out. I wanted to ask about the backlash that followed its release. You were accused of being industry plants.**

**Parlour:** We did struggle, to be honest, but when you have that integrity, you just have to grind your gears and keep looking at the songs that are to come. Immediately you panic because you don't know where it's come from and then you feel like shit. There's a discourse online that's untrue, and you can't control it. But you get to the point of realising that time tells the truest tales, and our songs speak for themselves.

**Risi:** It was just such a moment because we've been waiting to release music for so long – for literally years – to finally release something that we're so happy with, and the team that's been involved with everything from touring to recording is all our best mates.

**It did feel like a lot of faceless critics who would never say anything.**

**Parlour:** Yeah, and I get it; I've been that person who's asked: "Why is Rolling Stone suddenly covering that band?" But I've said it before, sometimes the answer is simple, and we are one of those simple answers. We got scouted by A&Rs at The Windmill in south London, and we've taken every opportunity since.

**Parlour:** Once the circus died down, though, it's

**"There's a discourse online that's untrue, and you can't control it. But time tells the truest tales, and our songs speak for themselves"**
**— *Parlour***

been incredible. We've got so many songs, and we just want to record them.

**Risi:** All Points East was incredible too because we got upgraded, and that was the first time, in front of a packed tent, that we heard a crowd truly singing 'Norwegian Wood' back to us. It's been an incredible few months really.

**Tell us about 'Judgement Day', your next single.**

**Risi:** I guess there's a progression from 'Norwegian Wood', and it's a vaster sound, but it's also nice because it was one of the first songs we ever wrote together. We were back in Manchester, and we were looking through our camera roll the other day, and we found videos of us [from] when we first got the song together. It was like we would never have thought that we would go from that moment when it was conceived to playing it to crowds around the country and being interviewed about it!

**What's next?**

**Parlour:** We've been focusing on the live stuff because I think that's where we're most comfortable. Like, that's where we have the most fun. And then it's deciding whether we're going to release another single, maybe another single after that. We have more than enough tunes for an album. We've got the songs and now we need to ask ourselves, "Can we get in there and make an album?" Yes, we can! Hopefully it'll be next year. I reckon so, I'm manifesting it.

Q&A

# Sofia Coppola

***In her stunning new film,* Priscilla, *the director shows a side of Elvis Presley that we haven't seen before***

**By BRIAN HIATT**

IN SOFIA COPPOLA'S eighth feature, the seductive, unsettling *Priscilla*, she shoots tail-finned Cadillacs as lovingly as she does her latest extraordinary lead actress (Cailee Spaeny as Priscilla Presley), capturing the beauty and hidden darkness inside Graceland – and in America writ large. Along the way, Coppola tells her most haunting coming-of-age tale since her directorial debut, *The Virgin Suicides*. This time, it's the true story of a teenager drawn into the all-consuming world of Elvis Presley (*Euphoria*'s Jacob Elordi, taller and scarier than Austin Butler) at the height of his fame, presenting without overt judgement a scenario most modern viewers will find horrific.

*Priscilla* feels like the culmination of Coppola's two and a half decades of filmmaking so far, and the latest confirmation that she's one of Gen X's greatest auteurs. But she seems most proud that she's reaching a new generation of fans, who are seeking her out as she promotes a new career-retrospective coffee-table book, *Sofia Coppola Archive*.

"We just had a book signing at Barnes & Noble in LA," she says over coffee at a West Village spot not far from her home, "and I met all these kids that were wearing *Virgin Suicides* T-shirts, and talking about that and *Marie Antoinette*. It makes me so happy that they're connecting to them and appreciate them, because I made them for young people."

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***Priscilla* really does feel like a summation of your work so far, touching on things you've done, but in a really fresh way.**

It really felt like a combination of stuff I've done before, but I hope not in a redundant way. Sometimes I felt like, 'Oh, yeah, this shot reminds me of something from *Marie Antoinette*,' or something else, but I was into it. It felt like I had my toolkit of all my things, and it was fun to put them all together. I think making the book made me stand back and look at them all together, which I never did. And I was like, 'Oh, I can see how they all fit together.'

**If John Ford can make a million Westerns, why can't you make as many films as you want in your area?**

Yeah, sometimes I just feel like I'm doing the same thing over and over again, but then I think about artists I admire, and they do the same. You're always trying to figure something out.

**Have you figured out what draws you to stories about young people?**

I'm always interested in stories about identity and how people become who they are. To me, a transformation is interesting. It would be boring to do something about someone who isn't going through something.

**You said that being a parent to teenagers makes you feel like you're the villain character now.**

It's just funny to find myself the mother of teenagers and that I'm the one they're pushing against. Usually in my work, I'm on their side, but now I have to be on another side of it. It's just funny to find myself living in this teen world as a parent.

**Most people would now see a relationship that started when Elvis Presley was 24 years old and Priscilla was 14 as grooming and exploitation. But in Priscilla Presley's memoir and in interviews, she makes it clear that to this day she sees it as a romance. How did you navigate portraying her perspective while also understanding that almost no one else is going to see it that way?**

It was tricky. I kept coming back to her perspective and her point of view. And I try not to be judgemental of any of the characters and really be as sympathetic as I can to each of them. And I'm really focused on her perspective, but even with

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the parents, you're like, 'How can anybody let their kid go live with Elvis that young?'

**There seems to be an increasing desire from some audiences for art that makes overt judgments.**
Yeah. And I even feel that people are trying to get me to say that in this film, and I feel it's only my job to show what her experience is like, and I think you present things to an audience for them to think about and make their own decisions. She ultimately left and found her identity outside of men, which I thought must have taken so much strength at that time. It was a big deal to have no income and divorce a powerful man. I know what a big deal that was at that time. So I was impressed that she had the strength to do that, to leave after her whole life being shaped by that.

**It does feel like you withheld judgement in *Marie Antoinette* in a similar way, which may have confused critics at the time, as much as that movie is beloved now.**
Yeah, I wanted to show the human side. In Antonia Fraser's book, she showed her as a human, not just a vilified woman in history. To me, it made a big impression – a 14-year-old girl put in this position.

**You're not at all afraid to shatter some of the Elvis mythology in the movie. He comes off as a distant, volatile, emotionally abusive drug addict.**
I never want to, like, take someone down and disrespect them. I think it's sympathetic to see his struggles and the human side, but definitely there's so much folklore of him as this god. There was someone that was trying to get me to take out all the dark stuff.

**Who was that?**
Someone kind of involved who was thinking about the perception of Elvis in the film. But I really wanted the ups and downs. You can't have a complex relationship with just the good side.

**There were moments when Priscilla is being seduced into this lifestyle where I was reminded of *Goodfellas*, which I bet was deliberate.**
Oh, when they go to Vegas, I was thinking of that! I love *Goodfellas*, so hopefully it was an homage.

**You were denied the right to use Elvis's music in the film. What had you been hoping to use if you had got permission?**
In our early cut, I had a few Elvis songs, but only two or three – to give some impression of him. But I always knew they might not give us permission, so I tried not to be too attached. I love 'Pocketful of Rainbows'. My husband played it for me, and I listened to it a lot when we were shooting, so I really wanted to use that song. And then when he first leaves for Germany, and there's a long sad-in-Germany montage, we had him singing 'Are You Lonesome Tonight?' and it was really like the voice of Elvis while she was left behind. Anyway, we couldn't use him, so Phoenix did the instrumental, and I'm really happy with the way the music turned out.

**You've used pop music masterfully in your films. Was there ever a moment when you were interested in being a musician yourself?**
I don't have any talent for it, but there's a lot of music in my family genetics, so maybe I got some gene that couldn't express itself. My cousin Jason [Schwartzman] is a musical prodigy – he can play anything – and there were a lot of musicians on my dad's side. His father [who contributed music to *The Godfather*] and his uncle, they're all musicians. Growing up, my brother, Roman, always played cool music for me. I felt like, 'How does anyone know about music without a cool older brother?'

**You've talked about despairing a bit about the state of Hollywood. It does seem like with the success of *Oppenheimer* in particular that the fever for franchises above all could be breaking.**
Yeah, I'm so happy that there's movies that aren't superheroes. I mean, no offence [to those movies]. I'm just happy that people are going to the theatres again.

**You mentioned you saw *Barbie*. What did you think of the movie?**
I'm glad that it was so successful and made for an audience of girls and women.

**One of the hallmarks of a lot of your movies is taking the feelings and experiences of young women seriously, and I've seen people draw parallels to Taylor Swift's work. Is that an artist you have any feelings about?**
I know my kids do, and I respect that, but I never really ... it's not my generation. But I like it when someone's writing their own material. I think it's much more interesting than a team. I think that's admirable.

**You once said you thought you were done with movies after *Marie Antoinette*. What was that about?**
I had a great time with Kirsten [Dunst] and Jason [Schwartzman], being in Versailles and in Paris at that time. But it was a lot to manage so many people. I was just worn out, and I was just like, 'Oh, I don't want to do this anymore.' And then, when I met [cinematographer] Harris Savides and we talked about minimal filmmaking, I got inspired to try to make *Somewhere* and go back to two people in a hotel room, and focus on the action and the story. [*Marie Antoinette*] was just a hard shoot, and then I was just over it for a minute. My daughter was born, and I was trying to take a pause. But there's something kind of addictive about making movies. You get an idea, and it bugs you until you do it.

**Your dad is currently making a large-scale opus at age 84, and it does seem like you share some of that relentlessness.**
He's been talking about that story for 40 years. I went to CalArts, and I was studying painting, and I remember my art teacher showing us the clip from *Close Encounters* when he's making the mountain out of mashed potatoes as a thing to show what artists go through. I think all creative people, you get something in your head, and then you have to figure out how to express it. And I feel like that's the best way to understand what it's like to be an artist.

**Your dad also finally re-edited *Godfather Part III* into a new version, which I really enjoyed. Is there a film of your own you'd do that with?**
My dad loves to recut his movies, and he's always saying, "You can do that!" I don't have any desire to. I feel like they are what they are, even with their baby fat and awkwardness, that's what I was thinking about at that time.

**The dreamy opening of *Priscilla*, where you see her putting on her eyelashes, reminded me a little of the beginning**

Coppola on set with Spaeny and Elordi

**"I never want to take someone down and disrespect them. I think it's sympathetic to see [Elvis's] struggles.... There's so much folklore of him as this god"**

SABRINA LANTOS

Spaeny, Priscilla Presley, Coppola and Elordi at Venice Film Festival

**of *Lost in Translation*. Where did that penchant for setting the mood that way come from?**
I love Wong Kar-wai, and the idea that movies can be a mood piece. I always start with these reference images and mood boards. With *Lost in Translation*, it's an impression – she's this young woman waiting around. It's an abstract mood. With *Priscilla*, it was having glimpses or impressions of Priscilla as we know her and then starting this story at the beginning of how she became that.

**So many people love Bill Murray, and at the same time, more than one person, including several actresses, have had what they say are bad experiences with him. What do you make of that, and how do you reconcile the side of Bill you know with his apparent dark side?**
He's always been so respectful and helpful to me, a great collaborator, but I know he's clashed with some people. I think he has different sides, like anyone, and he's not for everyone.

**In general, post-#MeToo, there's been a reassessment of some men, and a lot of that same balancing act for some of reconciling their own perceptions with others' experiences with people they knew. Do you have any broader thoughts on that?**
I think it's important to listen to women's experiences.

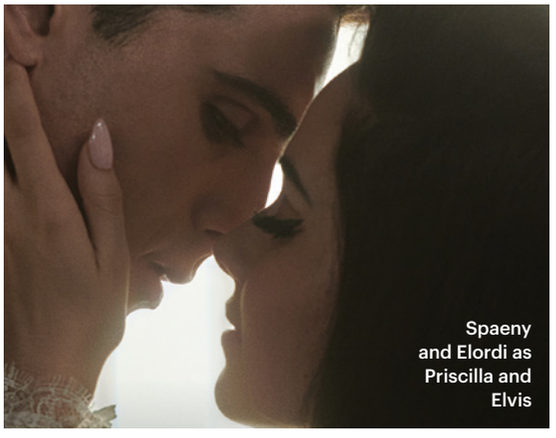
**You've had some brushes with big studios, including a meeting about directing the final *Twilight* movie way back.**
We had one meeting, and it never went anywhere. I thought the whole imprinting-werewolf thing was weird. The baby. Too weird! But part of the earlier *Twilight* could be done in an interesting way. I thought it'd be fun to do a teen-vampire romance, but the last one gets really far out.

**You also got pretty deep into a live-action *Little Mermaid* movie for Universal. Was there a particular breaking point on that?**
Yes, there was. I was in a boardroom and some development guy said, "What's gonna get the 35-year-old man in the audience?" And I just didn't know what to say. I just was not in my element. I feel like I was naive, and then I felt a lot like the character in the story, trying to do something out of my element, and it was a funny parallel of the story for me.

**Have you hit that wall of incomprehension often?**
It happens a lot because usually the people financing things are straight men. So it's not the same point of view, but you're trying to explain, like, "People, not everyone's gonna be into what you're into," but I just wanted to make things that appeal to me and express that.

**Some artists start feeling like they have so many projects they want to do and start wondering if they'll have time for them all. Is that where your head is at all?**
[After] making the book, I feel like I've done a lot of stuff. I don't feel in a hurry to make more stuff. If I didn't make anything else, I would feel like I made enough stuff.

**Is it possible that you only feel that because you just finished something?**
I'm sure. When I was finishing *Priscilla*, I said to my husband, "I don't ever want to do this again." And he said, "You say that every time." ®



Spaeny and Elordi as Priscilla and Elvis

**"My dad loves to recut his movies. I don't have any desire to. I feel like they are what they are, even with their baby fat ... that's what I was thinking about at that time"**

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# Rebel at Heart

Thomas Sabo

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# Master of his craft

## *Peace Okezie's stunning debut album,* How to Make a Master Peace, *defines him as a charismatic indie star for a new generation*

By **WILL RICHARDS**

IF THE INDIE sleaze explosion of the past few years has largely been nostalgic and retrospective, its forward-facing impact looks a lot like Master Peace aka Peace Okezie. The London-born singer's stunning, transformative debut album, *How to Make a Master Peace*, lifts sounds and energy from all corners of the 2000s indie scene, moulding it into something that's new and distinctive.

Across *How to Make a Master Peace*, you can hear the dark and energetic indie of Bloc Party on 'Panic101' and the electro rock of LCD Soundsystem and The Rapture on 'LOO SONG'. The loose, rowdy 'Shangaladang' splits the difference between Pete Doherty and M.I.A, while Georgia collaboration 'I Might be Fake' sounds like The Smiths' 'Barbarism Begins at Home' put through a nu-rave filter. It's an indie album in spirit and energy, but its sound bounces around restlessly, and Peace is endlessly inquisitive in his sonic choices.

Working with producer Matt Schwartz (Yungblud, Dylan), Peace left the comfort zone of his more traditional, boxed-in indie sound on last year's *Peace of Mind* EP to explore genre more widely and recklessly. "You don't risk enough," the producer told him, Peace recalls in our Rolling Stone UK interview. "You don't really throw yourself out there." The album is the sound of this risk paying off. Divorced from current trends and chasing only personal satisfaction, it dives headfirst into Peace's past and his inspirations. It's the sort of record that could completely change a teenager's life.

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**What was it that you wanted to change about your sound and style after the *Peace of Mind* EP, and how has this influenced the album?**

I played it safe on that EP. I knew where I came from and what I like and the reason people fell in love with me in the first place. It was very obvious – guitars and drums. You knew what you were gonna get. On the album, I realised that I needed to push the boat out. There's no way I can just sit on the sidelines and do the same thing again. I know a record like this will stand the test of time, and I want people to reference it when they're making their own records in the future. I didn't want to make what people want to hear in the current day and age. I wanted to make what I like and to stand behind it.

**Did it feel like a risk to make a 2000s-influenced indie record when it's not a sound that's in the zeitgeist right now?**

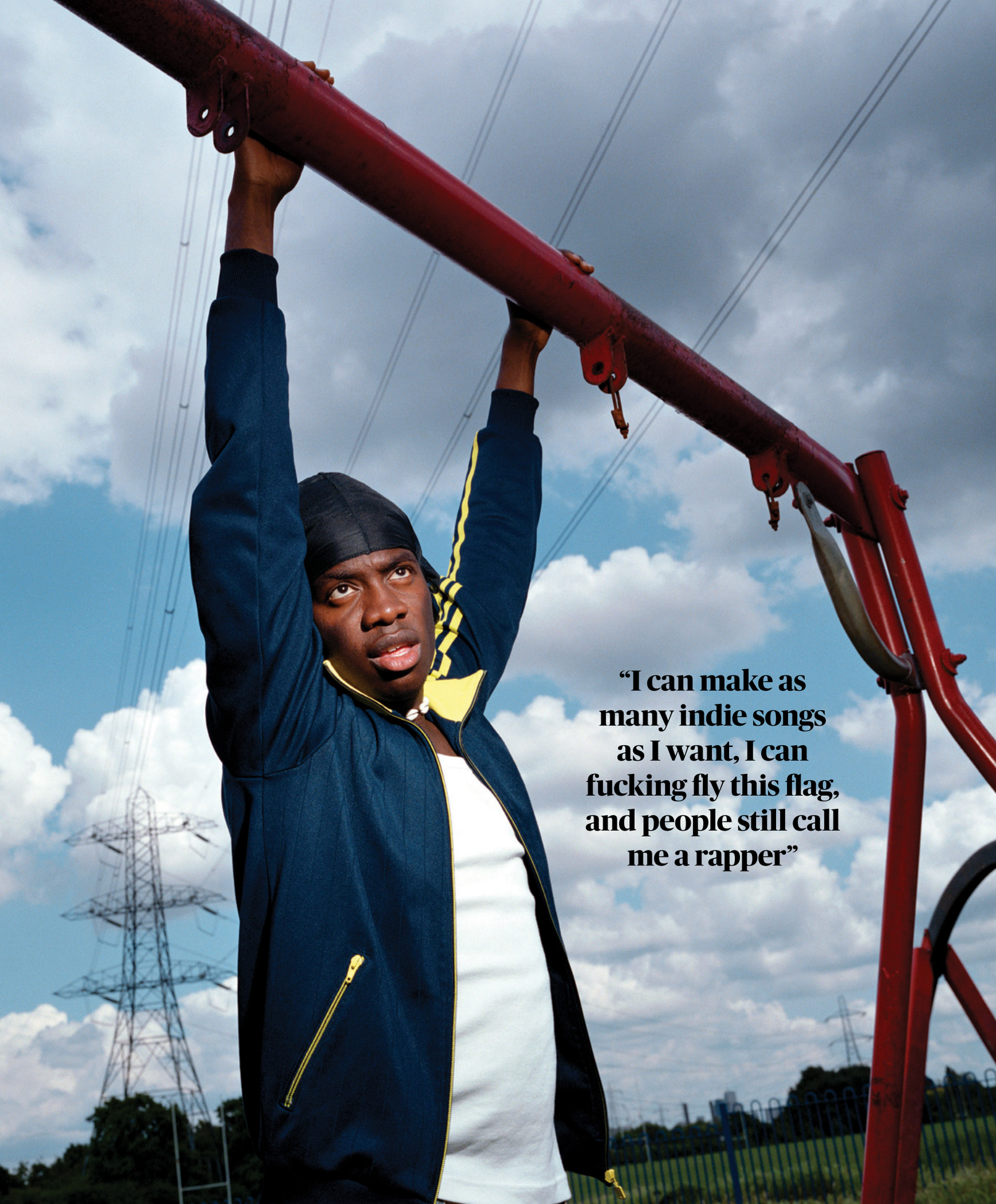
It is definitely a risk, but all the people whose music I love – M.I.A., Blood Orange – their music has stood the test of time. I know all this shit because I've studied it like it's an exam. Not to blow my own trumpet, but I know that no tune here sounds like anything else. This album is fucking clear. It needs a Mercury because I know it's pushing a boundary.

**It seems like you've had trouble being taken seriously as a Black indie artist. Do you think that's something people are now finally understanding about you?**

I can make as many indie songs as I want, I can fucking fly this flag, and people still call me a rapper. Then you have people like [Murray Matravers] the singer of [the band formerly known as] Easy Life, who raps on every song, but people aren't gonna call him a rapper. They'll call him a pop star! I talked to Rachel Chinouriri about this, and I was just like, "Bro, when are they gonna take us in? When are they actually going to accept us into that realm?" All I've wanted for so long is for people to just take me in, just a little bit. Take away the race and just actually listen to the music. It feels good to [be] finally, slowly getting there.

**In the era you draw inspiration from, Bloc Party's Kele Okereke and Lightspeed Champion's Dev Hynes (now Blood Orange) were vital in that representation — did they inspire you to pursue the indie sound?**

Those guys were like superheroes to me! I didn't get it initially, and I'd be lying if I said I did. I thought, 'Why are you guys making white people music?' But it's their thing, and it all came from Black people anyway! I knew in my head that if I could see these guys doing this thing, then I could do it as well. That generation was Kele and Dev, and I want the next generation to think that Master Peace was the person they looked up to. I go places now and see Black people, and they come up to me and thank me for what I'm doing. For me, that's maximum when it's coming from a Black person. I know how hard I've had to fight for people just to take me in and take away the colour from it, and just listen to the music, but it's so mad to hear it from my own people. If I can bring that for them and give people inspiration to want to do it for themselves, I feel like my job is complete. ®



**“I can make as many indie songs as I want, I can fucking fly this flag, and people still call me a rapper”**

MUSIC

# Making the world listen

*Mannequin Pussy are on fire, and they have no intention of cooling off anytime soon*

By ANDY GREENE

IT'S A LITTLE MORE THAN three hours before Mannequin Pussy take the stage at New York venue Brooklyn Steel in front of a near-capacity crowd. A long line of fans is already stretching down the block, waiting for the doors to open. But the four members of the punk band are unable to focus on much right now besides their desperate desire to get some rest.

They've spent the past month crammed together in a Ford Transit van, putting roughly 5,200 miles on the dashboard and playing practically every night. They slump down on a dressing-room couch, surrounded by piles of luggage, coffee mugs, a carton of Marlboro cigarettes, and a sad little Hormel platter of pepperoni and hard salami. They're here to talk about their new LP, *I Got Heaven* (out 1 March), but bassist Colins "Bear" Regisford, 37, isn't saying much, since he appears to be at least half asleep.

"The routing on this tour is not meant to be kind to the human body," says Marisa Dabice, 36, the group's co-founder and lead singer. "We're pushing ourselves to the absolute limit of what we're capable of."

Once their set begins and the adrenalin starts pumping, everything changes. Regisford's entire body pulsates with energy, and Dabice stalks the stage like a feral fusion of Patti Smith and Iggy Pop, belting out painfully personal songs like 'Perfect' ("*Kiss all my holes / Call me a bitch*"). Performances like this are a big part of what has earned the group a fiercely loyal cult following throughout the US over the past few years and huge buzz in the music press.

It's a level of success that would have all but guaranteed big money flowing their way if Mannequin Pussy were a rock band in the 90s. But things are different in 2023. Dabice drives around her adopted hometown of Philadelphia in a 2001 Saturn that looks like it's held together with duct tape. Until very recently, drummer Kaleen Reading, 31, was earning $15 an hour by working as a public-safety officer at a boarding school; she now makes ends meet by giving drum lessons. Regisford and guitarist-synth player Maxine Steen, 33, both work for moving companies, lugging furniture all over Philly whenever the band is off the road.

For Steen, who is trans and attempting to raise money for gender-affirming surgery via GoFundMe, the work is gruelling and sometimes humiliating. "I am a blue-collar bitch," she says. "And for a trans person, working as a mover is a pretty tough job. I catch a lot of shit just walking down the street. Trans people are constantly laughed at or stared at. It really sucks when you're carrying someone's dresser or couch up a flight of stairs." As hard as that can be, though, she's all-in on the band. "I didn't get into music to make money," she adds. "I got into music because I wanted to rip it. It keeps me alive."

Dabice relates to this all too well. As a middle-class kid growing up in the wealthy enclave of Westport, Connecticut, she always felt like an outsider. "I got made fun of every day for how I dressed," she tells me when we meet at a vegan cafe and coffee bar in Philadelphia about two weeks before the tour kicks off. "From a very young age, you're told you're a loser." Everything changed at 13, when she saw Massachusetts-based hardcore group Piebald open up for Jimmy Eat World. "I was like, 'Oh, my God,'" she says. "It felt like a safe place to be yourself and dress how you want and be around people that were as excited about music as I was."

Dabice's memory of her teen years is a little blurry, since she was diagnosed with a rare form of soft-tissue cancer right around the same time she was thinking about starting a band with some friends. "On a very molecular level, I think it changed my entire life," she says. "I was like, 'There's a chance I won't live very much longer. I want to do what I want to do with my life in a very uncompromising way.'"

She beat the cancer, but that attitude continued to fuel her through her time at University of Colorado and the lean years that followed. Around 2010, she formed Mannequin Pussy with guitarist Athanasios Paul, and they began gigging in Brooklyn bars as a duo; in 2015, Reading – who spent years in the all-female metal tribute bands Judas Priestess and Miss-Tallica – signed on as their drummer. "Then we were like, 'Why are we a three-piece with no low end? This is stupid,'" Dabice recalls. "We put out a call on Facebook looking for a bass player. Bear was the first person to respond."

Around this time, Dabice went through two breakups that left her emotionally shattered. One of the relationships was physically abusive. "It was so intensely toxic," she says, "and I never thought I would be the type of person who would end up in a relationship like that. It became a little hard to trust people again."

She poured all of her anger and sorrow into songs like 'Fear/+/Desire' ("*When you hit me / It does not feel like a kiss*") and 'High Horse' ("*Pushing me up against the kitchen sink / I feel your breath on me, I can taste it in my teeth*"). They became the emotional core of Mannequin Pussy's third album, 2019's *Patience*, even if she can't bear to revisit them today. "We don't do those songs in the set anymore," Dabice

**ROCK REBORN**
(Clockwise from front) Dabice, Reading, Regisford and Steen

**"What I learned," says Dabice, "is that you just walk around with these feelings inside you, and if you don't find a way to transform them, they eat at you like a poison"**

says softly, once the conversation has moved from the coffee shop to a nearby park bench. "But what I learned is that you just walk around with these feelings inside you, and if you don't find a way to transform them, they eat at you like a poison."

One *Patience* song they still perform at nearly every show is 'Drunk II', about a different relationship that went south. When they play it live, everyone screams along to lines like "*I still love you, you stupid fuck!*" But few know that parts of the song delve into even deeper, more delicate parts of Dabice's psyche, most notably "*And everyone says to me, 'Missy, you're so strong / But what if I don't want to be?*'" "That's about being a kid with cancer," she says. "My whole life, people have been telling me I was so strong, and I was actually falling apart inside."

*Patience* initially took off gradually. By early 2020, the band was booked to play Coachella on the same bill as Rage Against the Machine and Travis Scott – on the second-to-last line of the Saturday lineup, in a tiny font, but still. Then Covid hit, and the band's momentum slowed. During the year-plus break from the road that followed, Paul – the band's only consistent member from day one other than Dabice – quit Mannequin Pussy. They replaced him with Steen, a fixture of Philly's underground music scene. "She brought a new dynamic to the band because she comes from the synth world," says Reading. "Now, we have a whole new life."

The band cut *I Got Heaven* earlier this year in Los Angeles. "*Patience* was the aftermath of intense heartache," Dabice says. "*I Got Heaven* is the longing for something new and exciting. There's a pervasive feeling of longing and horniness to it."

Not long ago, Dabice says, she discovered that two major companies had blocked search terms that include the word "pussy", like the name of her band. "If you asked an Amazon Alexa to play Mannequin Pussy, it would just shut down," she says. "On TikTok, nothing would come up if you search our music – but if you typed in 'Mannequin Dick', our music would come up. It's like, to be feminine is to be profane. That's what we deal with... I think we all expected that the world would become less puritanical, but in fact the opposite is true." (She says that their label, Epitaph, asked the tech companies to fix their algorithms.)

At Brooklyn Steel, the band plays three new songs in its set. Every one sets the place ablaze. The median age of the fans moshing near the front of the stage seems to be about 20. As I watch this, I can't help but think of elders like Gene Simmons who proclaim "rock is dead." It may not be quite as visible, and today's rising rock bands may never make the sort of money that Kiss generated in their heyday, but acts like Mannequin Pussy prove there are still plenty of vital new ideas to be found.

Back in the dressing room before the show, I bring up the Simmons theory of rock to the band. This awakens Regisford from his slumber. "I don't really listen to fossils," he says. "It's like, 'Shut up.'"

"It's not like we're playing these shows to people in their sixties," Dabice chimes in. "We're often playing to people that are 15 and just discovering rock music for the first time. I don't think the barometer for rock is what's on the cover of Rolling Stone or the top of the Spotify charts. It's at these types of shows where people are experiencing a collective catharsis. And it's very much alive."

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Griffin Lotz**

# LIBERATING THE MUSIC

## Meet the artists of the AI-Powered Album

***By MATT TIGHE***

At the start of 2023, we looked forward to long-anticipated releases from some of our favourite artists. We envisioned up-beat tracks to pull us out of our gloomy winter slumber, glossy pop songs of the summer for those poolside hangs, and melancholic folk tunes to carry us into the season of the sticks. However, there's one thing we certainly didn't see coming: artificially created tracks achieving massive virality on social media.

Through AI technology, the internet has seen a first-hand sneak peek at the uncanniness of reimagined podcasts, hilarious celebrity deep-fake skits and musical performances from unlikely figures in pop culture, many of which indistinguishable from that of their real-life counterparts. Though entertaining, for many, the use of AI poses serious challenges for the future of musicians, who already fight an up-hill battle to adapt to the industry's constant flux.

Award winning music producer, Boi-Ida, has decided to take matters into his own hands by harnessing these technological innovations to create meaningful bodies of music. "I feel that if we can get in front of AI technologies and use them responsibly, we can support the future of music while maintaining its integrity," Boi-Ida said. Considering the lengthy resume of songs Boi-Ida has produced, from Kendrick Lamar to Rihanna, the producer proves to be the perfect guiding force within the exploration of this new music frontier.

Alongside BACARDÍ, Boi-Ida has gathered five up-and-coming artists, from across the globe, to collaborate through the Music Liberates Music program. The goal of this program is to uplift and expose these unique artists to emerging technology within the music space, creating a more efficient and equitable environment for artists to create their masterpieces. Together, these artists will create The AI-Powered Album. This record will investigate the power of AI, by developing a first-of-its-kind tool which will use the producer's stems and music catalog for the five artists to build off of with new demos they've all had in the works. Once the building blocks are in place, Boi-Ida will meet with each artist to finalise their track for the final EP.

"This technology wouldn't function without me, and it's so much just an extension of my own self, so I find that this AI tool is a new, more efficient way of doing work," Boi 1-Da explains, "By working with AI at the beginning of the music creation process, we have the power to unlock near-limitless creative possibilities and provide opportunities to collaborate in ways we could never previously imagine."

Among these artists are Bellah, Blackway, Floyd Fuji, Kyle Dion, and Savannah Ré, all musicians who have successfully showcased their versatility and adaptation within their creation of music. By taking part in this project, the artists will be fully trained on how to use this BACARDÍ-built AI tool, unlocking unlimited possibilities for collaboration and creative inspiration in the process. "I think any initiative that's both looking towards the future and combining music and technology is somewhere I want to be," Floyd Fuji, a featured artist on The AI-Powered Album remarks.

If the long history of music has taught us one thing, it's that humans will never stop building and that artists will never stop creating. We will constantly find ways to reinvent the wheel, improve production workflow and conquer whichever technological innovations are thrown our way. Since there is no feasible way to cease these changes, the only options musicians have are to embrace and utilise them as a productivity tool for meaningful artistic expression. This groundbreaking AI-Powered Album by Boi-Ida and BACARDÍ aims to do just that.

"AI will never be able to replicate a person's unique human experiences and the deeply complicated, never linear, human rollercoaster of emotions," Boi-Ida says, "You'll always feel the authenticity of a true artist, and a true artist will always find their voice, regardless of technology."

▽ Photo: Aijani Payne. Styling: Nicholas Mackinnon

# BELLAH

"My motto is always evolve or die," Bellah states, while describing her excitement for her upcoming feature on BACARDÍ and Boi-Ida's The AI-Powered Album. "I'm actually so intrigued by it all."

As a British R&B singer-songwriter with Nigerian roots, you can imagine how important authentic storytelling is to someone like Bellah. Her incredibly relatable lyrics bleed raw honesty and a loving passion for her craft, which is the very thing people fear that blossoming AI technology could potentially interfere with. However, Bellah, who has compared her intimate words to "the inner pages of a diary," doesn't seem too concerned with losing her soul in the process.

"AI can't tell my stories the way I can tell my stories, and it doesn't have my experience," Bellah confidently explains, reminding us that our individual perspective is far too rare to be simply replicated by technology. "I think if we use AI as a tool to assist, and not as a tool to completely replace, then [artistic integrity] should be preserved. It's art, so life imitates art."

Over the last four years, Bellah has successfully carved a lane for herself within the British R&B scene, a genre otherwise historically home-grown within the confines of the United States. However, these geographical boundaries haven't stopped Bellah, who has bulldozed her way through countless genre-centric borders, breaking the mold of R&B's traditional American legacy and re-interpreting it with a charming and distinctive English twist. Her 2022 EP, Adultsville, perfectly exemplifies this very humanistic quality that musicians are so eager to protect through this new wave of technology. "It's always nice to have a different perspective and it's going to be really interesting to have AI's perspective." she says.

It's this exact determination and openness to explore that makes Bellah a perfect collaborator for The AI-Powered Album with Boi-Ida and BACARDÍ, calling it a "proper new area of creation." This collaboration will be the first between Bellah and Boi-Ida, and her first-time using AI technology to create music. Bellah plans to go into this operation with an open mind, in the hopes she is "absolutely and beautifully surprised" by the final piece. "Boi-Ida is Boi-Ida, so it was kind of a no-brainer," she says. "It was nice to find out about brands that help emerging artists."

This sort of technology has the ability to help artists in several different ways, including giving them production resources they may have not had before. Having access to thought starters, AI generated outputs and general framework to create or re-frame a song can be extremely useful within a songwriter's creative process. In fact, Boi-Ida believes AI can "help rising artists take their careers to the next level by improving the quality of their demos."

Bellah agrees with this sentiment, mentioning AI can be leveraged as a powerful tool to assist artists who may not be as well versed in the technological side of music. "This will be really great for the artists just to play around with, man. I think it's the accessibility, like you said." she says. "You know, when Logic and laptops were available, and in everybody's bedroom, we got Bryson Tiller!"

Bellah also hopes it can be a more cost-effective way for artists to create higher production value, while cutting expensive studio costs on things like vocal processing, advanced mixing sessions and much more on the back-end side of the production cycle. "I feel like technology can help artists kind of play around with the music and get it sounding to a place where it doesn't feel so amateur and doesn't feel so homemade." Learning to use these tools can potentially create a much easier resource for creating higher quality music, and having this as an at-home resource calls for endless possibilities to express oneself from the comfort of their very own sofa.

Though excited to start this project, Bellah understands the initial apprehension surrounding these innovations and believes it's a natural reaction for musicians to look at this new phase of art technology with uncertain eyes. In fact, historically speaking, new technology has always been met with initial concerns. When drum machines were popularized in the 1980s, drummers worried they would be out of a job. When autotune started to run rampant, in the early 2000s, the tool was heavily criticized for being a shortcut for singers to hit certain notes. However, Bellah doesn't feel this should stop musicians from experimenting and confronting these obstacles head-on. She is approaching this project with a desire to grow, intimately collaborate and actively learn an entire new skill set.

"Technology has helped music, for how many years? I'm pretty sure this is how the old-school singers felt when autotune was introduced," Bellah reflects. "Evolution has to happen, right?"

△ Photo: Paula 'Narcography' Abu. Styling: Gelmira Manico
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# 2023 Rolling Stone UK AWARDS

IN COLLABORATION WITH RÉMY MARTIN

**To commemorate the first Rolling Stone UK Awards ceremony, in this special Awards issue we salute those whose creativity, drive and passion have lit up the worlds of music, film and television across the UK and Ireland**

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THE ICON AWARD

SUPPORTED BY VISIT WEST HOLLYWOOD

# "I'M STILL HERE!"

**The 'Godfather of heavy metal', Ozzy Osbourne candidly chats to Rolling Stone UK about his life and 50-year career and how his greatest dream is to perform just one more time**

BY **Nick Reilly**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Danielle Levitt** FASHION DIRECTION AND CREATIVE DIRECTION BY **Joseph Kocharian** STYLING BY **Katja Cahill**

**PREVIOUS PAGE**

OZZY WEARS FAUX-FUR COAT BY **MELI**, SHIRT BY **FENDI**, TROUSERS BY **SAINT LAURENT**, CROSS NECKLACES BY **CHROME HEARTS**, DOG-TAG NECKLACE BY **JASON OF BEVERLY HILLS**, RINGS BY **ROCKFORD COLLECTION**, RING BY **DAVID YURMAN**, BRACELETS BY **LUIS MORAIS**, WATCH BY **CARTIER**, HOLDING CANE BY **FASHIONABLE CANES**

**THIS PAGE**

OZZY WEARS JACKET BY **CHROME HEARTS**, FEATHER CAPE BY **NICOLE + FELICIA**, FEATHER JACKET BY **NORMA KAMALI**, TOP BY **GIORGIO ARMANI**, TROUSERS BY **SAINT LAURENT**, RINGS BY **DAVID YURMAN** AND **ROCKFORD COLLECTION** AND **LOREE RODKIN**, CROSS NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS**, SKULL DOG-TAG NECKLACE BY **JASON OF BEVERLY HILLS**, WATCH BY **CARTIER**, BRACELETS BY **LUIS MORAIS**, HOLDING CANE BY **FASHIONABLE CANES**

"IF WORLD WAR Three ever happens, and they start using the big shit, I'm going to put a big fucking target on my roof!" comes the defiant cackle emanating from a grand oak-panelled room in a palatial California mansion.

"I wanna be right under the fucking thing! I'll just say, 'You cunts! I bet you can't hit our house.' Even if they've got a 50-megaton bomb! Imagine if I crawled from the debris with half a body, shouting, 'I'M STILL HERE!'"

Stop the press, please. You may have read numerous reports about Ozzy Osbourne's health in recent years, but I can assure you that the man sitting in front of me is not, contrary to popular belief, being consigned to his darkened crypt just yet.

Instead, the vim and vigour that emerges from Ozzy Osbourne, 74, in the time I spend in his company leaves me convinced that, despite countless bouts of surgery and physical setbacks in recent years, only a fool would dare to write him off.

In a career spanning more than 50 years, Ozzy Osbourne has not so much become an enduring icon of heavy metal as much as he is the establishment-baiting, darkness-dwelling alchemist who was at the centre of the genre in the first place. It's why he is the perfect choice for the first-ever Rolling Stone UK Icon Award, supported by Visit West Hollywood.

But on his icon status, Ozzy Osbourne is less sure.

"I wish I felt like a fucking icon!" comes the typically deadpan and sweary response, delivered in a warm and familiar Brummy brogue that hasn't faded one bit. "I've had a long career, and I've raised a few fucking eyebrows along the way. I've met some amazing people. I've done some good gigs, and I've done some fucking bad gigs."

It's a neat summation of his career, sure, but one that modestly underplays his rather significant role in modern music...

**"I WANT TO BE WELL ENOUGH TO DO ONE SHOW WHERE I CAN SAY 'HI GUYS, THANKS SO MUCH FOR MY LIFE.' IF I DROP DOWN DEAD AT THE END OF IT, I'LL DIE A HAPPY MAN"**

***OZZY***

OUR RELUCTANT ICON'S story begins in Birmingham in the late 1960s, when a teenage abattoir worker called John Osbourne became friends with Terence Butler or, as he was known to his mates, Geezer. When the pair teamed up with guitarist Tony Iommi and drummer Bill Ward, the early foundations of what would become Black Sabbath were laid.

Upon the release of their eponymous debut album in 1970, the four-piece would change the face of popular music forever. For that record, the group created a sound that was quite unlike anything else at the time – an album that took the foundations of their blues rock backgrounds and turned them into something that was uglier, thematically scarier and far more intense.

The album's title track, for instance, was written by Butler, who occasionally dabbled in the occult. He was in bed one night when he saw a vision of a cloaked black figure standing at the end of his bed. "It frightened the pissing life out of me," he has said of the apparition, which is represented on the album's eternally unsettling cover.

Ozzy's distinctive wail also defined the album, as did Iommi's wild guitar riffs. The guitarist honed his distinctive playing style after losing the tips of two of his fingers in a factory accident.

The group had delivered what is now widely considered to be the first-ever heavy metal album, and discerning music lovers immediately pricked up their ears to its doom-laden tunes. By the time the band's second album rolled around a mere seven months later, the group had become underground heroes. The record's perceived flirtation with satanic imagery also sparked a moral panic in the press and saw the band attracting a few unwanted fans too. Once, they returned to their hotel to find 20 black-clad satanists holding black candles and chanting while standing outside their room.

Even a usually unflinching Sharon Osbourne was nervous when she first met the band. "I remember being very intimidated by them all when we met for the first time," she recalls. At the time, she was working for her father Don Arden, the infamous rock boss who managed the group throughout the seventies. "I just thought, 'Oh Lord, this is a bit strange.' They were sitting on the floor of the office, and I was afraid to look at them in the eyes because I didn't know what they were going to do or say."

It all set Ozzy on a trajectory that would see him become one of rock's most influential figures. After being unceremoniously fired from Black Sabbath in 1979 due to substance abuse, he forged a solo career that made him a far bigger star than he ever was with Sabbath. To date – including his time with the band – he boasts in excess of a cool 100 million record sales under his belt and has enthralled and, at times, repulsed people around the globe in equal measure.

He is the man who bit the head off a bat on stage in Des Moines, Iowa, after mistaking it for a rubber toy. He's also the man who offended the entire state of Texas by taking a piss on the Alamo.

Having lived life to its fullest, he's now one of the few famous people – alongside The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards – who genuinely leave us wondering what kind of planet we're going to leave behind when they're the last ones standing. Such is his ability to withstand the effects of years of excessive drink, drugs and general hard living that in 2010 a geneticist concluded after sequencing Ozzy's genome that he is a "genetic mutant".

But even if Ozzy remains the defiant survivor who has weathered a storm of addictions and overdoses, it's fair to say that a few setbacks in recent years have left some of the wider world wondering if Old Father Time is finally catching up with the Prince of Darkness.

Earlier this year, he underwent a fourth bout of spinal surgery to remedy the damage inflicted by a fall in 2019 which dislodged the metal rods that were put into his body after a serious quad bike crash at his Buckinghamshire home in 2003.

"It's really knocked me about," he tells me. "The second surgery went drastically wrong and virtually left me crippled. I thought I'd be up and running after

the second and third, but with the last one they put a fucking rod in my spine. They found a tumour in one of the vertebrae, so they had to dig all that out too. It's pretty rough, man, and my balance is all fucked up."

The events of recent years have taken a toll on his family, says Sharon. "It's been nearly five years of heartache, and at times I've just felt so helpless and so bad for Ozzy, to see him going through the pain.

"He's gone through all these operations and the whole thing has felt like a nightmare. He hasn't lost his sense of humour, but I look at my husband, and he's here while everyone else is out on the road. This is the longest time he hasn't ever worked for. Being at home for so long has been so foreign to him."

At the same time though, Ozzy believes that some of the press reports have been somewhat wide of the mark. "I'm getting pissed off reading the papers, and they're saying things like 'Ozzy is fighting his last battle'. He's sung his last 'Paranoid'. You know, I don't even think about Parkinson's that much," he says of the neurological condition he was officially diagnosed with in 2003.

"Every time I scratch my arse, they put it down to Parkinson's!" To further prove the point, he outstretches his arms – showing very little signs of the tremors that affect the majority of people suffering from the condition.

"You do find out who's a genuine friend when you've been through what I've had," he suddenly adds, unprompted. "Tony Iommi has been so supportive of me since my illness," he beams. But then the mood in the room suddenly shifts. "Geezer Butler hasn't given me one fucking phone call. Not one fucking call," he says, the emotion significantly heightened in his voice as he speaks of his Sabbath bandmate.

"When his son was fucking born, I phoned him every fucking night even though we were at war with each other, Black Sabbath and me [after his sacking]. I thought, 'Fuck it, he's my mate, I'm gonna call him.' But from him, not one fucking call.

"It's sad, man. We all grew up together, and he can't pick up the fucking phone like a man and see how I'm doing. Even Bill Ward has been in touch with me. I said some things about Bill, and I don't know why I said it, but when I came through my illness, he contacted me."

He adds, seeming genuinely hurt: "I'm not in shock, I'm just very fucking sad that he can't just call me after all this time and say, 'How you doing?' Fucking arsehole."

Why did the pair fall out in the first place?

"His wife and my wife had a falling-out!" he says. "But that's got fucking nothing to do with me. Are you really going to hide behind your wife's skirt because of that?"

Arguments aside, the numerous surgeries and setbacks have left Ozzy's fans wondering if we'll ever see the Prince of Darkness back on stage again. A brief glimmer of hope emerged when he did a surprise hometown performance at the closing ceremony of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022, but another bout of surgery forced him to officially confirm his retirement from touring at the beginning of the year.

While not counting himself out of a return to the stage, Ozzy is unsure how realistic it is.

"I'm taking it one day at a time, and if I can perform again, I will," he concedes. "But it's been like saying farewell to the best relationship of my life. At the start of

**THIS PAGE & OPPOSITE, TOP**

OZZY WEARS SHIRT, TROUSERS AND COAT BY **SAINT LAURENT**, MASK (OPPOSITE) BY **CECILIO LEATHER DESIGNS**, NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS**, RINGS BY **ROCKFORD COLLECTION**, BRACELETS BY **LUIS MORAIS**, WATCH BY **CARTIER**, HOLDING CANE BY **FASHIONABLE CANES**

**OPPOSITE, BELOW**

OZZY WEARS SHIRT, TROUSERS, COAT AND OVERCOAT BY **DOLCE & GABBANA**, NECKLACES BY **CHROME HEARTS**, RINGS BY **ROCKFORD COLLECTION**, BRACELETS BY **LUIS MORAIS**, WATCH BY **CARTIER**, HOLDING CANE BY **FASHIONABLE CANES**

OZZY WEARS JACKET BY **CHROME HEARTS**, FEATHER CAPE BY **NICOLE + FELICIA**, FEATHER JACKET BY **NORMA KAMALI**, TOP BY **GIORGIO ARMANI**, TROUSERS AND SHOES BY **SAINT LAURENT**, RINGS BY **DAVID YURMAN** AND **ROCKFORD COLLECTION** AND **LOREE RODKIN**, CROSS NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS**, SKULL DOG-TAG NECKLACE BY **JASON OF BEVERLY HILLS**, WATCH BY **CARTIER**, BRACELETS BY **LUIS MORAIS**, THORN CROWN AND SILVER CLAW BY **XTENDED IDENTITY**

my illness, when I stopped touring, I was really pissed off with myself, the doctors, and the world. But as time has gone on, I've just gone, 'Well, maybe I've just got to accept that fact.'

"I'm not going to get up there and do a half-hearted Ozzy looking for sympathy. What's the fucking point in that? I'm not going up there in a fucking wheelchair. I've seen Phil Collins perform recently, and he's got virtually the same problems as me. He gets up there in a wheelchair! But I couldn't do that."

Even if a final performance doesn't materialise, Ozzy says he still owes a lifetime's debt of gratitude to the fans that transformed him into one of the biggest rock stars in the world.

"That's one of the things I've been the most fucking pissed off at: I never got the chance to say goodbye or thank you," he says, his voice rich with heartfelt gratitude. "Because my fans are what it's all about. If I can just do a few gigs... They've been loyal to me for fucking years. They write to me, they know all about my dogs. It's my extended family really, and they give us the lifestyle we have. For whatever reason, that's my goal to work to. To do those shows. If it's at Ozzfest or somewhere, or even a fucking gig at the Roundhouse [the venue of the Rolling Stone UK Awards, in collaboration with Rémy Martin]!

"If I can't continue doing shows on a regular basis, I just want to be well enough to do one show where I can say, 'Hi guys, thanks so much for my life.' That's what I'm working towards, and if I drop down dead at the end of it, I'll die a happy man."

But even if physical challenges might stand in the way of live performances, modern technology means that there are plenty of alternatives. Last year, ABBA won huge acclaim with their *Voyage* show – which uses cutting-edge technology to present on-stage projections of the Swedish group that are often indistinguishable from the real thing. Could an Ozzy-tar be on the horizon in the near future?

"Well, Sharon took me to some birthday thing a few years ago, and I was sitting at the front of this fucking marquee, and suddenly the lights go down, and a fucking Frank Sinatra hologram appeared. It was 18 inches fucking tall! I just turned to her and said, 'What the fuck is that?' I just cracked up laughing at it." We'll take that as a maybe, then.

Instead, Ozzy's longer-than-anticipated convalescence has allowed him to do a lot of thinking, he explains. He's been searching for spirituality, but admits he won't become a "fucking monk, my brain won't last five seconds". More recently, he's been thinking of the friends who aren't here anymore. He lost a close friend in Motörhead's Lemmy in 2015, and he also laments the loss of UFO bassist Pete Way in 2020, who played with him throughout the 1980s.

"I've been doing a lot of reflection while I've been laid up, and all my drinking partners, I've realised they're all fucking dead!" he exclaims. "The graveyard's full of them! You're dead and you're dead and you're dead."

Coming back round to the subject later in our chat, he adds: "I should have been dead way before loads of them. Why am I the last man standing? I don't understand any of it. Sometimes I look in the mirror and go, 'Why the fuck did you make it?!' I'm

OZZY WEARS SHIRT AND TROUSERS BY **SAINT LAURENT**, NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS**, RINGS BY **ROCKFORD COLLECTION**, BRACELETS BY **LUIS MORAIS**, WATCH BY **CARTIER**, HOLDING CANE BY **FASHIONABLE CANES**

GROOMING: **DENIKA BEDROSSIAN** AT THE PRTNRS

HAIR: **JONATHAN HANOUSEK** AT EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS MANAGEMENT

FASHION ASSISTANTS: **TRACEY MOORE, ALIYA LAHIJANI**, **ATEANA SWABY** AND **GABRIEL LANGENBRUNNER**

TAILOR: **YULIY MOSK**

WARDROBE PA: **SOPHIA LINK**

not boasting about any of it because I should have been dead a thousand times. I've had my stomach pumped God knows how many times."

Does he fear death? "I don't fear dying, but I don't want to have a long, painful and miserable existence. I like the idea that if you have a terminal illness, you can go to a place in Switzerland and get it done quickly. I saw my father die of cancer.

"But look, I said to Sharon that I'd smoked a joint recently and she said, 'What are you doing that for! It'll fucking kill you!' I said, 'How long do you want me to fucking live for?!' At best, I've got ten years left and when you're older, time picks up speed. Me and Sharon had our 41st wedding anniversary recently, and that's just unbelievable to me!"

It's fair to say that Ozzy and Sharon have been one of rock's most influential couples, but also one of the most tumultuous. Despite meeting through her dad, Sabbath's manager, their relationship didn't truly bloom until Sharon became Ozzy's manager when he left the group.

They tied the knot in 1982 and have weathered a lifetime's worth of storms – a great deal of which have stemmed from Ozzy's rock'n'roll lifestyle.

"It's incredible to think that I've had more of my life with Ozzy in it than without him," Sharon tells me in a separate chat. "I just can't think of my life without him in it. It's unthinkable for me. I've never loved anyone as much as I've loved him, and without that there's no hope of keeping a relationship together, is there? Our relationship hasn't been rainbows and roses the whole time, and it's been really tough. But that's life, isn't it? I just know that my life is better with my husband in it than it is without him."

Ozzy, meanwhile, says that Sharon has "saved my arse". "Talk about tough love!" he smiles. "She'll still walk in the room and give me one look that [makes me think], 'Oh fuck, I've done it now.'"

She's the manager of his career and, you sense, his life too.

"I remember being first attracted to her great laugh. When she laughed it was just fucking fun."

Together, they have forged a familial unit that is ostensibly rock's first family. They are parents to Aimee, 40, Kelly, 39, and Jack, 38. The latter two shot to fame in 2002 when MTV commissioned *The Osbournes*, a fly-on-the-wall documentary that showed the family – minus Aimee – going about their daily business in Los Angeles.

It was the simplest of premises, but one that would change the face of both reality TV and Ozzy's public persona forever. It showed the chaotic day-to-day happenings of family life and in turn transformed Ozzy from a hardened rocker into a cuddly, bumbling family man who found joy in the smallest things.

In one memorable episode, he sweetly showed a then-teenage Jack a recently rediscovered keyboard from his Black Sabbath days ("Look at this baby, Jack! This thing is fucking awesome when it gets going! It's got a Sabbath sticker on the back!")

In another, hugely relatable clip that has recently done the rounds on TikTok, he's trying to find the person who "has been in my room and taken my beers", before Sharon politely tells him he's already drunk them.

"When I first did that show, people accused me of selling out," he recalls. "But I just thought it's all part of the deal. I'm not doing the fucking news at six. I never really watched it, but recently I did an interview where they showed me clips of it, and I realised that our kids can show our grandchildren what it was like with their grandparents when they were kids. It's a good living diary of what happened.

"But the thing is, now it's all scripted reality," he adds. "They set the stage, whereas *The Osbournes* literally took the madness of what went on in my house every fucking day! You could be watching it, and suddenly someone comes running through with a fucking frying pan on fire. It was just normal for us – we'd swear, we'd cuss, and there'd be fucking dog shit everywhere. That's what we were really like. It all started to get a bit silly in season three, where they'd suggest stuff like taking us on a boating trip, and I just thought, 'Oh, fuck off!'"

He adds: "We were asked to do another series, but the kids were fucked up from it, I was fucked up from it, and Sharon was going through cancer. Rock'n'roll fame was one thing, but TV was just off the fucking Richter scale."

**"I LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND GO, 'WHY THE FUCK DID YOU MAKE IT?!' I SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEAD A THOUSAND TIMES. I'VE HAD MY STOMACH PUMPED GOD KNOWS HOW MANY TIMES"**

***OZZY***

As for family life these days, it's being a grandfather that brings Ozzy the most joy. He may still be the Prince of Darkness, but he's a strong contender for the happiest man on the planet when he speaks about Sidney – Kelly's son with Slipknot DJ Sid Wilson who was born in 2022.

"I can already see what's he gonna be like," Ozzy grins warmly. "He's gonna be a real proper little boy, poking sticks and setting fire to things. Just like I was! We get on great, and it's just fucking wonderful. I never had a chance to see much of my kids growing up because I was always on the road. But being at home has allowed me to do that as a grandad, and little Sid is just fucking great. He really is.

"It's been the making of Kelly too," he adds. "If I've got a favourite kid, it's Kelly."

Are Jack and Aimee aware of that? "Oh, they know it! Me and Kelly, we're like two peas in a pod!"

Next up for Ozzy, then, is finalising his long-gestating move back to the UK. He and Sharon have been planning a return to the family's Buckinghamshire abode after extensive renovations, and their trip to the Rolling Stone UK Awards will give them the first taste of what to expect.

"I'm going to take him around Birmingham so he can see the Ozzy Bull in the station and the Black Sabbath bench," says Sharon.

Ultimately, though, the city's love of the musician is just one small testament to how a local lad went and changed the world, achieving musical immortality in the process.

"I do count my lucky stars. I don't know why I'm still here and I do sometimes think I'm on borrowed time. I said to Sharon the other day, 'What a great fucking life we've had and what a great fucking experience.'"

Ozzy Osbourne, as the first-ever Rolling Stone UK Awards icon, we salute you.

THE FILM AWARD

IN COLLABORATION WITH RÉMY MARTIN

# THE STORY SO FAR

**From cult TV show *Skins* to Oscar-winner, Daniel Kaluuya's career trajectory is the stuff of dreams. Now, the self-confessed storyteller has returned to his roots to direct his very first feature film, *The Kitchen*, a tale of Black British life in a dystopian London**

BY **Corrina Antrobus**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Danny Kasirye** CREATIVE DIRECTION AND STYLING BY **Joseph Kocharian**

**PREVIOUS PAGE**

LEATHER JACKET BY **CHEMA DIAZ**, TOP BY **PAUL SMITH**, TROUSERS BY **OFFICINE GÉNÉRALE AT MATCHES**, JEWELLERY THROUGHOUT, DANIEL'S OWN

**THIS PAGE**

DANIEL WEARS COAT BY **VALENTINO**, SHIRT BY **MR P AT MR PORTER**, TIE BY **VALENTINO GARAVANI**, TROUSERS BY **OFFICINE GÉNÉRALE AT MR PORTER**

I'M IN A north London barber shop that has defied gentrification and remained in business for almost 30 years. Although this fact reveals his age, the shop's owner, Nev, is only a little irked that he didn't get a heads-up before his super famous client glided into his premises for our interview. As he punctually floats in off the street like any other guy, Daniel Kaluuya apologises: "You know how it is, Nev," he says, in a covert reference to his A-list status. It's the first insight I get into how Kaluuya navigates fame. Sitting in his long-time barber's shop, he comes across like one of the lads. As a string of Nev's regulars walk in, they each receive a brotherly nod of respect. No entourage, security or conspicuous Jeep have accompanied Kaluuya here, but his appearance provides clues to his celebrity – from how he holds himself, to the delicately embroidered name tag on his varsity jacket and the designer sunglasses worn backwards across what must be a fresh fade.

The barber shop represents more than the place where Kaluuya gets his hair cut. It's where the seed was first planted for his latest venture and directorial debut, *The Kitchen*, out soon on Netflix after its premiere at the London Film Festival for the event's closing night gala screening.

"Back then it was *Reservoir Dogs* in a barber shop," says Kaluuya of the project's inception. The idea came about after he overheard a conversation about the million-pound smash-and-grab robberies that targeted London jewellers. "I heard about the heists and how the guys doing it were getting £200. £200? That means there's no one around that they can sell it to for a million. It said a lot about class." It set him thinking about the thieves "who didn't understand their worth," as he says.

Rather than writing a traditional film treatment, Kaluuya shot a "taster" here in the barber shop to "show the idea in the medium that it's going to be digested in – none of this coffee shit". With a low chuckle that frequently warms our chat, he lovingly recalls the condition he had from boss man, Nev. "He would've given [the location] to me for free, but we threw him some change. I remember him saying, 'Just don't cut me out!'" As promised, Nev appears in the film numerous times – more of which later.

Not even halfway through his thirties, Kaluuya, who turns 35 in February, has already garnered the kinds of accolades that tell a poster-boy success story, making him the obvious choice to win The Film Award, in collaboration with Rémy Martin. After playing Posh Kenneth in *Skins* – he also co-wrote a number of episodes – he won big-screen roles that have carved a new cinematic language by meticulously exploring the historical and contemporary Black experience.

*Get Out* tackled the facade of Obama's 'post-racial' America, looking at what it's like to be Black in middle-class white society. Set in 1960s Chicago, *Judas and the Black Messiah* follows Kaluuya as one of the chairmen of the Black Panther Party. The film's themes rode the wave of the Black Lives Matter uprising of 2020. Also, on that note, Marvel's *Black Panther*, which centred Black characters and the Afrofuturism of its setting in Wakanda – a fictional country that imagined a world in which Africa had not been colonised – was bold in its take on the superhero genre, which until then had mostly revolved around white males and focused on the West. Kaluuya's filmography is more than just impressive, it's *culturally* significant.

While his previous work saw him explore American politics, with *The Kitchen*, the Camden Town-born actor has come home to platform Black British life with something he says aims to be "unapologetically us" with the "richness and complexities of our house".

Whatever you thought you knew about Kaluuya becomes further enriched after viewing the film, which he admits without hesitation is his most personal work.

Along with co-writer Joe Murtagh (*Calm with Horses*) and co-director Kibwe Tavares (of Sundance hit *Robots of Brixton*), Kaluuya tells a dystopian story of a London that has sold its soul. All social housing has been eradicated, and the 'Kitchen' is the last of the blocks still standing. Despite orders to move out, many residents refuse to leave their homes. Although set in a near crumbling future, the date specifics were removed so people could "leave it to the imagination".

**"IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF IDENTITIES, THE BLACK BRITISH IDENTITY IS NEW. WE HAVE TO OWN OUR IDENTITY, OWN THE FACT THAT WE ARE HERE, AND THIS IS WHAT WE'RE ABOUT"**

***KALUUYA***

On the film's promo poster is the strapline 'every city has its Kitchen', a poetically solemn statement that begs to be unpacked. "We're articulating something dynamic – that the people that are seemingly oppressed are actually resilient. They are joyful, but also don't fuck with us! A lot of this was inspired by Liverpool and what they did with the *Sun* newspaper, where they just told everyone to fuck themselves. Then, it was the only northern city not to vote Brexit, and that's not an accident. They have a unified identity."

While this is a Londoner cherishing his version of the city, themes of gentrification, the widening rich-poor divide, grief and fatherhood are deeply embedded. Deeper yet, within this Valentine to a city that raised Kaluuya to be strong, lies an observation of the capital's complicated roots.

Echoing the film's strapline, Kaluuya says: "I feel like every city has a 'Kitchen', and I think because of the history of London and the Blitz, it's more pronounced. We were bombed, and we survived. There are still traces of that within our being, but the class system dims us, so [with this film], I'm like, 'Take the light and shine!'"

Is *The Kitchen* a warning as to where we are heading? "It's not a warning. It's happening! Before the Blitz, this is how London was. That's what Dickens was talking about – poor against rich, and we're going back to that." As an example, Kaluuya highlights how Camden Market has had its soul watered down, "This film explores the idea that what if there was one bit that had the last bit of soul left?"

Kaluuya's study of London's history is most

pronounced through former Arsenal football player and TV pundit Ian Wright's character, Lord Kitchener, who he confirms is a "doff cap" to the calypso singer and the Windrush generation – not the former British Secretary of State for War. "There's a lot of culture that is from the Windrush generation, let's keep this real," says Kaluuya. Having the person that's the leader and voice of the community in the form of Lord Kitchener was representative of that heritage. Honouring the fact that Kaluuya's cadence is Ugandan – he was born in London to a Ugandan mother – he acknowledges the "Jamaican influence" that many young Black Londoners will feel.

"In the grand scheme of identities, the Black British identity is new. Windrush was the 40s and 50s, so it's new really in the history of the world. Now is the time I feel like we have to own our identity, own the fact that we are here, and this is what we're about. And no, we're not apologising for being here, and if you don't get it, so what?"

Wright, with his Jamaican parentage, couldn't be more suited to his role as a pirate radio DJ with the oratorical urgency of Samuel L. Jackson in *Do the Right Thing*. You'd be forgiven for thinking this was a 'Gooner' hiring his hero, as it's no secret that Kaluuya is a huge Arsenal fan. "We did a podcast once, and I was so starstruck," he says of the football legend. But Wright

**"I HAVEN'T FIGURED IT OUT YET — IT'S MY FIRST FILM. THIS IS FOR THE PEOPLE. I WANT THE PEOPLE THAT THIS IS ABOUT TO FEEL IT"**

***KALUUYA***

auditioned for his part like anyone else, so it was well earned, Kaluuya says assuredly. "With Ian, it's about who he is, not what he does; he just happened to have done amazing things as well. That's what was needed for Lord Kitchener's role."

*The Kitchen*'s representation of London's hall of fame goes further than *Match of the Day*. Kano (yet another Windrush descendant) is cast as Izi, a brooding and distant dad, yet he's still recognisable as one of the finest UK rappers to leap from grime to the big screen. After a dearth of decent representations of Black fatherhood, Kano (alongside an equally sensitive portrayal by Demmy Ladipo) delivers a refreshingly complex version of a man learning to be a parent to 12-year-old Benji (played by Jedaiah Bannerman).

Commending the results, Kaluuya explains how their linear shoot schedule helped crack the chemistry between the pair. "We shot as chronologically as possible. So, as they get to know each other, the bond gets deeper," he says.

Improvisation was key to the authenticity of these scenes. Kaluuya is an alumnus of what's regarded as one of the first acting schools for working-class kids, London's Anna Scher Theatre, and has talked fondly of the improvisation techniques he learned there and still uses to this day. "It was all improvisation. When I write something – that's the cut of the suit; then we get to tailor it. If I write a line and Jedaiah's sitting there, and he doesn't say it right, then throw it in the bin! Kano was amazing at that; he would just find some truth. In the last take, I'd say, 'Do what you feel.' The

DANIEL WEARS DENIM JACKET AND JEANS BY **LOUIS VUITTON**, TRAINERS BY **CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN**

majority of the takes we used were from that because it's fresh."

Through these characters, Kaluuya says he wanted to be as "honest" as he could about fatherhood and "how messy it is".

"If you're a selfish man, you make certain decisions and there are repercussions," he says. "Doesn't mean you're heartless, as the world has told him to be selfish. Fatherhood is earned. It's not like, 'Boom, you're a dad now.' It's 'Are you going to show up?' I want certain men to come out and think, 'You know what? I have that situation with the mum... allow it.' We see Kano experiencing his son's firsts – like his first rave – so then he's like, 'What else have I missed?'"



IN A DECADE that has seen Kaluuya bestowed with an Oscar and an Oscar nomination, Golden Globes and BAFTAs, it's little wonder why it has taken time for him to deliver his writer-directorial debut. "The Golden Globes, Oscars – that helped make this happen. What was that quote? 'I want to stay clear of opportunities, so I can focus on my dreams.' I had to think what was worthy of taking me away from this. It's always been the most important thing to me," he says of the stepping stones that paved the way to this moment. "Every shoot

**THIS PAGE**

DANIEL WEARS JACKET BY **PALACE SKATEBOARDS**

**OPPOSITE (TOP)**

DANIEL WEARS SHIRT BY **ALEXANDER MCQUEEN AT MATCHES**

**OPPOSITE (BELOW)**

LEATHER JACKET BY **CHEMA DIAZ**, TOP BY **PAUL SMITH**, TROUSERS BY **OFFICINE GÉNÉRALE AT MATCHES**, TRAINERS BY **EMPORIO ARMANI**

or play that I've been on, once finished, I've been back to this."

How does it feel sitting here full circle in the place where it all began? "Nuts. Yesterday, I was still processing it, and today..." he inhales deeply, "more is coming." Not that he's read any of the reviews (apart from, he says, a glance at Rolling Stone on the way here). "It's art. If the critics go, 'Oh, this area's not sharp.' I know! I haven't figured it out yet – it's my first film. We're young filmmakers growing and figuring things out, artists exploring our gifts. This is for the people. I want the people that this is about to feel it."

Passionately expanding on the importance of authenticity, he says, "It had to feel like the people that come to this barber shop. I wanted to see as much of what I see outside on the screen. Every time I see something on the screen, I think, 'This is fake!' It doesn't have the energy. So, I was like, 'Why don't we just use this?'" he gestures, signalling to where we're sat. "'What we love?'"

While *The Kitchen* has notes of hope, ultimately, it's a snapshot of London in the dust and rubble. He has captured a zeitgeist as London pants with exhaustion from a prolonged Tory grind, and the cost of living crisis splinters society to breaking point. "I've been very blessed with a couple of different moments in films that I've done, but I realise when you tell the truth – it's the truth! It may feel like things conspire, but we're being honest about what we see."

Music is one of the tools used to convey the atmosphere of the capital. The score, fashioned by Hackney's Labrinth, features tracks that pulsate through nightclub scenes, providing a soundtrack familiar to anyone who frequented Bagley's, Corks or Ministry of Sound, to name but a few of the nightclubs Kaluuya wistfully recalls. And anyone who's been to an R'n'B nightclub will know the arresting power of the Candy Dance, so called because it is often danced to 'Candy', by 80s band Cameo. *The Kitchen* pays homage to the infamous synchronised slide. One-upping it from Spike Lee's 1999 romcom *The Best Man*, which led to it becoming a wedding dance staple, Kaluuya has brought it home and placed the routine on wheels. Can he Candy dance in rollerskates? "No, I cannot! The Candy Dance is like church for the club. It's the one moment where everyone will just stop and dance in unison. It's like: how do you visually show a community having fun at the same time? I feel that was the way to articulate it. I love music. That's what I wanted to get across – music is what London is."

Inadvertently, to prove his point, we move to the pub next door where we're shown a "quiet" table as loud Latin American music thumps from a speaker above. As he pauses to politely confirm that, yes, he is the guy from *Black Mirror*, I can't help but wonder how he manages his fame.

"I never meant to make this my life. I do a lot of work to make sure I don't lose touch with reality, but accept I can't do certain things now," Kaluuya says. "I realised I couldn't get on the Tube after I had an argument – my third in a row." He explains how camera phones have caused a shift in the culture of celebrity. "People film you on the Tube, and I'm a guy who likes a nap

DANIEL WEARS DENIM JACKET AND JEANS BY **LOUIS VUITTON**, TRAINERS BY **CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN**

BARBERING BY **DAMON ELLESTON**

MAKEUP BY **JOJO WILLIAMS** USING **SKINCARE BY S'ABLE LABS, MURAD AND TATCHA**, MAKEUP BY **MAC COSMETICS** AND **CLINIQUE**

ON-SET STYLE CONSULTANT: **CHERYL KONETH**

LIGHTING ASSISTANT: **HENRY HEWITT**

DIGITAL ASSISTANT: **JEM RIGBY**

FASHION ASSISTANT: **AARON PANDHER**

– I know the right stop to get off – it's an art!" But it's not his fame that causes the intrigue, "It's because of the projects I've picked and what they mean to people that get the Tube. If I did *Pride and Prejudice* at The Dolman Theatre, I doubt I'd be bothered." Apart from missing his naps on the underground network, what else does he pine for from the layman's life? "Notting Hill Carnival," he says immediately. "Fuck me, everyone who goes Carnival out there – enjoy that shit!"

WE MEET AGAIN the next day following his Rolling Stone UK cover shoot. He's ready to wind down before heading off on a much-needed holiday. Channelling off-the-clock vibes and excited by the offer of food, we settle into a cosy King's Cross cinema.

Returning to the theme of authenticity, I ask if Kaluuya sees *The Kitchen* as the beginning of a new wave of films that will represent multicultural London and its people. He pauses, contemplatively. "Guy Ritchie did it. Jonathan Glazer did it," he says, going on to hail Shane Meadows as "the man" in terms of evocative British cinema. But he admits that those names aren't showing a Black British London. "What I'm saying is, 'Let's not rely on them to tell our stories.' Why are we waiting on them to do it? Why would they? We're asking people who don't know us to speak for us – it doesn't make sense."

Looking at the space that Kaluuya's career has made for more Black experiences to be articulated on screen, I flag an interview from *Essence* magazine between him and Jordan Peele, where he had confessed to almost giving it all up. "A lot of my self-esteem was in other people's hands," he explains. "Even though I was achieving the checkpoints that I wanted, it was hollow because I didn't feel ownership over my career," he says. Speaking of the "rage" he felt, Kaluuya talks of finally taking some time out to find what he loves, which would include writing *The Kitchen*. It was a point at which he felt an existential shift. "I want to do it for people that are around me socially as opposed to professionally," he reflects. "I realised I was getting respect from people that weren't paying my bills or that would uplift me. All those decisions lead to the inevitability of fame. Because, basically, I've moved from self-serving to service."

From a decorated actor to running his production company 59% via putting his name to youth theatre projects in partnership with the likes of Camden Roundhouse, what *can't* he do? "I can do anything," he says with his matter-of-fact charm. "I've always believed that. It's how I feel about myself. I'm a storyteller. I just believe in my heart that I can do anything. I don't know where it comes from. It's just how I feel."

*The Kitchen* is parallel to the cinematic styles that Kaluuya has become associated with. "Dystopian sci-fi suits my sensibility because usually there's a lot of dark humour, and usually they're bold enough to cast a Black person as the lead because... it's fake," he says, rolling his eyes. "But I love George Orwell. I love that satire. I love Chris Morris, Charlie Brooker. But I want to do a romcom, or more comedies, or just a romance." I enthusiastically declare that I would love to see him do a romcom. "Make it happen! Tell people! I'm built for a romcom. I want to see incredibly cinematically crafted, amazing stories that are innovative and forward-thinking about love and about joy. I think that's one of the main reasons I'm here. We're in dark times, and love is needed way more than anything else."

After this first taste of movie-making, Kaluuya is discovering what his directing style is. "I like bringing people together and helping people communicate. I'm sensitive, so I can understand when someone's off. I'm very trusting in my team – I want them to show me shit I don't know. Also, I like having a laugh. People make their best work when they're happy. We'd have races, or days like 'drip Monday'." I pause. Despite our similar backgrounds and being less than ten years apart in age, I confess that I don't know what 'drip' means. Humouring me, Kaluuya plucks the very nice fabric of what he's worn to the shoot. Almost disappointed, he says with a laugh, "Come on! It's where everyone came wearing their best clothes. Things like that that bring energy to set."

**"I CAN DO ANYTHING. I'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT. IT'S HOW I FEEL ABOUT MYSELF. I'M A STORYTELLER. I JUST BELIEVE IN MY HEART THAT I CAN DO ANYTHING"**

***KALUUYA***

As for his own mentors, he cites William Stefan Smith (director of the Kaluuya-starring short film *Two Single Beds*) and Ryan Coogler. "Ryan gave me advice that changed the course of this film. I really care about original cinema, but I was a bit too extreme at first. Ryan said, 'Look, *The Lion King* is based on *Hamlet*.' I was trying to make a whole new human and not accepting that a human has to have arms, fingers, legs. And knowing that there is biology and physiology to the storytelling and the structure. Only then you can maybe break the rules or put a twist on it." Still staying true to his thespian roots, he also bigs up *Second Coming* playwright and director Debbie Tucker Green. "She's incredible. When I wrote *Skins*, I was 18, and I didn't know her, but she sat me down, and the first question she asked was, 'How are you? This is a lot; you're 18.' Throughout this whole process, she's always been checking in. [Theatre director] Sacha Wares too. I feel like theatre storytellers understand a story in a different context; they don't have the bells and whistles, and I wanted *The Kitchen* to be as integral as that."

On the future, Kaluuya is very certain about what's next. "Whatever. The. Fuck. I. Want," he says with that grin. "I'm not letting my occupation lead me. I'm an artist. I'm a storyteller. Where's the story? Where do you want me to serve? I want to be multidisciplinary but that's just being a London creative. Michaela Coel, she used to be a poet. Kane – is just Kano! We're putting non-creative archetypes in non-creative roles. I don't know what I'm doing, and I think that's OK. What's next? Everything is next." ®

THE BREAKTHROUGH AWARD

SUPPORTED BY VOLVO

# COMING OF AGE

**With heartfelt songs of crushes and overcoming heartbreak on her number one album *The Good Witch*, 23-year-old Maisie Peters deftly captures the agony and ecstasy of youth. Here, she discusses her friendship with Ed Sheeran, the ups and downs of being online, and how she mines her personal life for inspiration**

BY **Charlotte Manning**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Lewis Vorn** FASHION AND CREATIVE DIRECTION BY **Joseph Kocharian** STYLING BY **Luci Ellis**

**PREVIOUS PAGE**

MAISIE WEARS T-SHIRT BY **ERL**, CHOKER BY **MANOKHI**

**THIS PAGE**

DRESS BY **CECILIE BAHNSEN**

IT IS HALLOWEEN when I sit down to chat with Maisie Peters. It almost feels too perfect a time to take a deep dive in and around her summer album release *The Good Witch*, packed full of spooky connotations and an exploration into, well, witchery. She promises that "some effort" is going into the costumes for tonight's Bristol gig, teasing: "You'll have to just wait and see."

This is a pop star who is used to being very much online. She's wearing a non-serious T-shirt bearing Robert Pattinson's face, and one of the first things I'm shown is a cat meme that I – also chronically online – have seen dozens of times before. "It's been the most mental year of my life," laughs Peters. "Everyone keeps joking that my eyes are getting smaller and smaller. I'm giving... Have you seen that cat meme? It's like, 'I'm awake, but at what cost?' (She quickly searches for it on her phone.) This is what I'm giving right now. I sit across from people and give this tired cat that says, 'Awake, but at what cost?' And that is me."

The 23-year-old is the recipient of The Breakthrough Award, supported by Volvo. It's a category stacked full of young, rapidly emerging talent, including names such as Olivia Dean, Shygirl and Wunderhorse. But it's Maisie who is this year's stand-out. She played Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage the day her second album dropped, and when it quickly shot to number one in the UK Official Charts, Peters became the youngest female act to achieve this feat in nearly a decade, plus her UK tour culminated in a sold-out date at Wembley Arena. It doesn't really get better than that, does it?

"We drove into Glastonbury and listened to the album; it had just come out, it was really cool and special," she recalls. While her gigs often feel like a party, she had even more to celebrate this time around. Peters and her band stayed in a very apt "fairy-castle hotel" near the world-famous festival and decided to simply spend the album-release weekend living their best lives at Worthy Farm. "We played the show. It was kind of crazy because the new album came out that day. Imagine working on your job, and it's the biggest weekend of the year? All systems go. This was the biggest week we were going to have.

"But you can also just go to Glastonbury and have fun? It felt wrong," she admits. "I'm just here vibing in the healing fields, but my album is out – it was so fun." They did what every Glasto-goer did, soaked up the atmosphere and watched Elton John, Lana Del Rey and went to Shangri-La – dreamy.

As I approach the O2 Academy Bristol via a slightly dodgy backstreet later that rainy evening, there are hundreds of buzzing fans queuing, who, like me, are largely girls in their twenties. I end up feeling pretty under-dressed in my reliable straight-cut jeans and ribbed crop-top gig combo. As I enter, it's clear that under the sea of raincoats and umbrellas, a lot of preparation has gone into these outfits. A mixture of Halloween fancy dress (mainly witch costumes, of course), alongside pleated miniskirts with Y2K-style "baby tees" (concocted by Peters, which she often dons on tour) are there to greet me. This (now very signature) look came "very naturally" to her: "I thought it would be fun if we made little baby tees with lyrics on before the album came out, to tease at the shows. People were like, 'Oh, my God, Maisie Peters has done another baby tee.' Then people also started making their own. I thought, 'Well, this is cute, this is a thing!' So, I kept doing it. People started making their own, and it became almost like a little uniform for this album. To me, that's what style is – it should be easy, and you should just feel good."

At one point, the crowd scream the words to 'Mr Perfectly Fine' by Taylor Swift as the excitement builds. I somehow feel I've missed the memo on this being a collective anthem among fans, but it makes a lot of sense. Swift, Peters says, is an artist she's "extremely honoured" to be often compared to as her star only continues to rise. It's little wonder, then, that she's been snapped up as support for Swift's European 'Eras' tour next year, having grown up with the megastar as one of her main inspirations. "I love the music that she makes. I love her records; they're all so important to me. I'm really, really honoured to be compared to her, and to be thought of in the same frame of mind, in anyone's mind, as her. She's a big inspiration of mine," she says.

**"I SEE VIDEOS OF MYSELF FROM THE FIRST IRISH SHOWS, AND IT FEELS LIKE A DIFFERENT VERSION OF MYSELF. I'M SO GRATEFUL THAT ED [SHEERAN] BELIEVED IN ME"**

***PETERS***

When Peters arrives on stage to whoops and cheers from the crowd, she immediately takes command of the venue, skipping out dressed as Glinda, the OG good witch, moments after her band – aka Dorothy, the Lion and the Scarecrow – arrive in position to 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz'. Occasionally waving her wand at the crowd, who proceed to cling onto every note, it's as if she's cast a spell on the room. Her confidence in her ability to put on a stellar show seeps through. "Are you ready for the best night of your lives?" she asks to rapturous applause.

From seamless guitar changes to refreshingly honest interactions with fans ("There's nothing scarier than my romantic history... ghosts, demons, clowns. This year, I graduated from clown university"), the singer proves throughout the evening to be an absolute master of the crowd, a skill she's no doubt developed in spades after spending time on tour with her 'boss', Ed Sheeran.

After signing with Sheeran's Gingerbread Man Records back in 2021, Peters has now released both albums under his label. The pair have a strong friendship, and she recounts an afternoon they spent watching *Star Wars* movies earlier this year during "the craziest one-day trip of my life" in New York.

As well as juggling her own tour dates, she's acted as a support for Sheeran. The pair were on the road for more than 60 shows together on and off throughout 2022 and 2023, travelling from Dublin to Byron Bay: "I get to say that I did that forever," Peters notes. "It's a crazy thing to have done in your life. I did it when I was 22, 23, and it's just the coolest.

"We did America, Australia, New Zealand, UK, Europe... It was crazy," she says of the experience. "I learned so much. I see videos of myself from the first Irish shows, where we began, and it feels like a different lifetime, a different version of myself. I just felt like a different person before this year. I'm so grateful that he took me around the world and believed in me."

To nobody's surprise, she marks her territory as the "number one Ed Sheeran fan in the world". It would be hard to argue with that claim at this point. "He's so generous and kind, and he's really talented, and he's smart," she continues. "It's a privilege to get to tour with somebody like that, someone that's also just so good as a human being. It's the easiest and the best thing because he's so lovely."

Sheeran would later appear at her Wembley show to perform his own breakthrough hit 'Lego House' together in a gorgeous full-circle moment: "He let me play his Wembley, so I figured I should let him play mine," she tells the crowd on her final night. This is a sentiment she jokes about again during her Rolling Stone UK cover shoot, teasing: "It's great to be able to support up-and-coming artists."

The best piece of advice from him that she can share ("the best piece of advice... it's probably not appropriate for the wider world") is what she's learnt from watching him perform. Of course, she's been to more of his shows than most. "He really puts the crowd at the forefront of the shows. For Ed, those shows are about the audience and making them feel involved and making them feel like they've had the most special night they can possibly have, which is so cool," she says. "It makes me think of Paul McCartney saying, 'Of course I play the Beatles' songs. These shows aren't for me; these shows are for them.' I love that mentality, and I try to keep that with me."

AT HER ROLLING Stone UK cover shoot, Peters' warm persona lights up the room. She takes turns to chat to everyone in between being snapped, and answers questions to camera with ease, often checking the prompting notes she's made on her phone. The soundtrack of the day is purely Girls Aloud – later that day it's confirmed the group will be having a revival. How perfectly... witchy.

Speaking of witchiness, sophomore album *The Good Witch* was written about a surprisingly short period in Peters' life, and its contents again prove how well she can connect with her audience. "I really do write for the girls," she observes. "I really made a whole album based on a relationship that lasted for one month and maybe two weeks." The record is a painfully familiar look into the heartbreak, frustration and unpredictability of a short-lived romance, yet she provides drops of joy and growth in equal measure, meaning a sense of hope always remains at the core, never allowing the sadness to win. "I wrote this album about that time in my life. It depicts the same six months with, give or take, a few different songs."

But she doesn't always write that way: "As I get older, I've tended to draw on my own life more frequently, but that's not necessarily always chronologically accurate. I'll write about something that happened four years ago like it was yesterday – it doesn't matter to me. I am

**"I REALLY DO WRITE FOR THE GIRLS. I MADE A WHOLE ALBUM BASED ON A RELATIONSHIP THAT LASTED FOR ONE MONTH AND MAYBE TWO WEEKS"**

***PETERS***

MAISIE WEARS TOP, SKIRT AND SHOES BY **SHUSHU/TONG**, SOCKS BY **RAEY**

MAISIE WEARS T-SHIRT BY **ERL**, SKIRT BY **DIESEL**, CHOKER BY **MANOKHI**, SOCKS BY **RAEY**, SHOES BY **MIU MIU**

The Good Witch; I make what I want out of the things that are happening." Peters has also remained adept at turning fleeting moments into the basis of a whole track. In 2022 fan-favourite release 'Cate's Brother', she recalls meeting her housemate's brother for the first time and quickly developing a huge crush. This led to intense lyrics, "*And my heart went 'Love him, he's the one, and we shall wed,'*" she sings.

The album and its subsequent deluxe version – released in October – touch on literary inspirations, including influences from the world of Greek mythology and fantasy, alongside a dose of religious imagery too. 'The History of Man' is a prime example, dotted with Biblical references: "*So Samson blamed Delilah...*". Elsewhere, 'In Guy on A Horse', one of the deluxe tracks, Peters compares herself to Joan of Arc, depicting an elevated version of herself, as she criticises an ex-partner's habit of looking down from his high horse.

"It wasn't conscious. I wasn't mood-boarding all my different literary inspirations or anything like that," she explains, but there is an element to *The Good Witch* that acts as a conceptual album of sorts. "I got to write in that universe, which I loved. 'The History of Man' has some Greek mythology in it, and then 'Wendy' is essentially about Peter Pan. I was dancing around these universes."

Gender is another theme very present throughout much of the record, with Peters viewing her journey between debut *You Signed Up for This* to *The Good Witch* as "giving girl-to-woman", having done a lot of growing in the past two years. "There are a lot of threads and themes that look at gender and in what it is to identify as a woman and what it is to know men, which sounds a bit dramatic," she says. "It's funny because if you were to count the most used words in *The Good Witch*, they are the words 'obsessed' and the word 'man'. I don't know what that reflects about me, but it's something to think about..."

The six new deluxe tracks were all written prior to the album initially being released. Among them, there is a mixture of songs from when she was in the process of writing *The Good Witch* as well as tracks that didn't quite make the first selection. "They were very much floating around and were different people's favourite songs and had something important about them. They were important enough that I felt like they deserved to live within the world, too."

The extended album closes with gorgeously nostalgic 'The Last One', which very nearly made it into *You Signed Up for This*. "'The Last One', I wrote for my first album, but right at the end, so it didn't make it. It feels like such a closing track. But 'Tough Act' became the closing track on my first album, so that was done [and] dusted." She believes some songs can have extremely specific destinies in that they must be placed at certain points on a record "or it's not going to happen". She continues, "Sometimes I write a song, which I know is either the title track of the album, and it opens the album, or it will just never come out – 'The Last One' was one of those songs. But I love that song, and it feels really special it now gets to close *The Good Witch*."

Her favourite lyric of the entire album comes from the song 'Yoko', dealing with misunderstandings

MAISIE WEARS JACKET BY **SELF-PORTRAIT**

PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT **JULIETTE NAJMAN**

STYLING BY **LUCI ELLIS** AT THE WALL GROUP

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY **ELIZABETH RITA** USING SKINCARE BY **TEMPLE SPA**, MAKEUP BY **CODE8** AND **ARMANI BEAUTY**, HAIR PRODUCTS BY **DAVINES**

SHOT ON LOCATION AT BROOKLANDS STUDIO, WEYBRIDGE

that followed after Peters left a relationship she really hoped would work out, relating this to the common misconception surrounding Yoko Ono's part in the break-up of The Beatles. "'Yoko' is one of my favourites, and I always wanted that to be on the album, but she didn't quite make it. There's a lyric in that song that's my favourite lyric from this whole album: '*You have a phone, you should have called*'."

While the two LPs in her discography may seem quite different on the surface, she feels there are many similarities. "I always say they are sister records to me," she explains. "Even the Deluxe really emphasises that because there are songs on there that I wrote for the first album. The Deluxe is a good way to tie up any loose ends, I guess, and to make sure everything I wanted to say from those years, hopefully, is out. I mean, there's always more things I want to say!"

Elsewhere, Peters' online persona is generally an incredibly positive one, having created a space in which her fans clearly feel extremely comfortable, seen and safe. However, this hasn't made her immune to her fair share of negativity on the internet too, something she's experienced more this year than ever before. Yet she still manages to deliver a witty response to the not-so-nice comments she's been on the other end of. "You can say with a wry smile, 'At least I'm relevant,'" she smiles. "It's really difficult, and you get bitten twice as hard when you're someone that is online," she says. "You're engaging, and giving yourself to people, and then, suddenly, the mood changes, and people don't like you, or don't like what you've given them. You're like, 'But I was just trying to create, or I was just trying to show you this new song!' It feels very personal, even though you try to turn it off."

**"YOU'RE ENGAGING, AND GIVING YOURSELF TO PEOPLE, AND THEN, SUDDENLY, THE MOOD CHANGES, AND PEOPLE DON'T LIKE YOU. IT FEELS VERY PERSONAL"**

***PETERS***

Through any negativity, Peters remains incredibly self-aware, and doesn't seem to hold any resentment towards those directing the vitriol her way. "These people don't know you. It's normally a teenager tweeting, and good for them! I was a teenager tweeting once too. We've all done it. As long as I shall live, there will be teenagers tweeting, as they should." Still, she admits it's hard to not feel that she's being "personally attacked", and the comments have taken their toll at times. "People forget I'm still a person that's seeing this. I've experienced that this year. I've found it really difficult. When you're touring and away from home, and you're really tired and running on empty, and then you just see X, Y and Z on TikTok or on Twitter about yourself, it really takes it out of you."

She recognises there's a balance to be struck today. "As I get older, I find myself trying to disentangle from living my life online a little bit, which is healthy and natural. No one is 17 on the internet forever, and that's a good thing. I was 17 on the internet, and it was a wild time. Now I am trying to separate those two things. [Being online] is just easy for me. I also think it's fun: seeing everyone's outfits, funny TikToks. You need to try and not take yourself or the internet too seriously, because it's such a fickle place. It's fun when it works for you, but it's not so fun when it works against you. Ultimately, I've had so many wonderful things happen because of it, so I'm always going to be there a little bit... even just to stalk."

Being present on the internet has been central to Peters' career – she started out by posting videos of herself singing on YouTube when she was 15. But this year, she reached new peaks of online fame when her 'There It Goes' video went viral on TikTok in early autumn, painting a very relatable picture of the aftermath of an intense end-of-summer breakup in a vast city like London. Fans latched onto a couple of specific lines, "*I'm doing better / I made it to September / I can finally breathe*", and "*The comedown of closure / The girls and I do yoga / I wake up and it's October / The loss is yours*". Fans started producing their own visuals to the track in cute clips which soon flooded the app.

"Everybody wants something to take off on TikTok or to have a moment, but it was so fun that this moment was so organic," she reflects. "What started happening was actually just this wonderful, sweet, pure, wholesome thing where people were using the sound, '*I'm doing better / I made it to September*,' to round up little edits of their life and all the great things in it." Peters admits she "couldn't believe it" when she realised the song was going viral. "To see all these videos showcasing love and friendship, healing and growing and people just being themselves, I was like, 'This is so cool.' I'm so pleased and happy that was the moment, that's what took off, because it's so beautiful and lovely."

In what Peters calls a "cliche" answer, it's her parents she immediately shouts out when asked who she wants to dedicate The Breakthrough Award, supported by Volvo, to, as they have been by her side on her incredible journey since she was a teen. "They drove me to pubs to play when I was 15," recalls Peters. "My dad would come with me when I was busking so that if anything shady happened, he could be there, but he would also pretend not to be my dad, he'd just loiter around. They've always just been really supportive, so yeah, I would like to dedicate [this award] to them."

On what's next after this whirlwind year, Peters has a clear objective: "I'm going to bed!" she declares, itching to spend some time at home. "I haven't spent more than two days at home since July. I'm going to be in London, just walking around, so say hi if you see me. God damn, I hope I'm in my rest and relaxation era." She plans to spend the coming weeks "cooking meals and going to exercise classes" and generally doing very little. "Is it the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* grandparents who are in bed all day? That's what I'm going to channel. I want to collect my thoughts a little bit. Then in the New Year, that's when I'll start making some more music. I have some thoughts and ideas [for the third album], but we'll have to see what happens. Life takes you in surprising places sometimes."

THE LIVE ACT AWARD

# YUNGBLUD

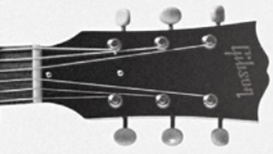
**There's no holding back when this supremely talented, outspoken star takes to the stage, and the energy is infectious**

BY **Nick Reilly** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Kosmas Pavlos**

‘BEST GIG OF my life,” came the exhilarated declaration from Dominic Harrison, the pop-punk titan otherwise known as Yungblud, minutes after bringing the house down at a sell-out show at London’s Wembley Arena in February.

Over the space of two hours, Harrison had delivered a show that saw him prove his chops as an electrifying live performer. Standing in front of 12,000 fans, he preached his gospel of inclusivity, acceptance and being whoever the fuck you want to be to a crowd who lapped up his every word.

“Never be afraid to be yourself. If people don’t like you for it, they’ve got no fucking imagination,” he told them at one early juncture. “You’re fucking brilliant just the way you are. People still misunderstand me. They’ll never fucking get it. But it doesn’t matter because we’ve got each other.”



It’s for this reason that Yungblud is the winner of The Live Act Award. This is the man who is a “Tasmanian devil of pop-rock”, as our cover interview explained last year, but also one who has managed to forge his own individual path as a very 21st-century rock star.

He may have all the uniting energy of the genre’s greatest stars, but he matches it with a unique ability to create a space where his crowd can feel safe from the world for a couple of hours, regardless of their colour, creed, sexuality, or pronouns.

He is also an artist who is unafraid to speak up about global issues and to use his platform for good. At one gig in Delaware, Harrison spoke up about the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian girl killed in her home country by morality police for not wearing her hijab. A recording of Yungblud discussing it was uploaded to his TikTok account. It is currently one of his most popular videos on the app, with nearly nine million views.

“I am not gonna stand here and question someone’s religion, but I am gonna fucking fight for expression. I am gonna fight for freedom, and I am gonna fight for the women of fucking Iran right now,” he said.

It helps that he’s also received the thumbs-up from some of rock’s leading lights, who are only too happy to recognise greatness when they see it. He managed to rope in Ozzy Osbourne, our first-ever recipient of The Icon Award, supported by Visit West Hollywood, to appear in the video for ‘The Funeral’, released last year. Elsewhere, Queen’s Brian May has also given Yungblud his seal of approval – high praise given that the man spent years performing alongside arguably the greatest frontman of all time, Freddie Mercury.

**“I WANT TO ERADICATE HATE. THAT’S WHAT I’M HERE TO DO: FOR YOU, FOR ME, FOR EVERY FUCKER IN HERE. I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE EVEN IF YOU KNOW IT OR NOT”**

***YUNGBLUD***

“Every now and then, while idly scrolling in the park, you come upon something that makes you go ‘Wow,’” May wrote after watching Yungblud’s performance of ‘We Are the Champions’ and defending him against criticism on social media.

Elsewhere, Yungblud has managed to elevate that live persona even further by performing with the likes of Bring Me the Horizon’s Oli Sykes and collaborating on two tracks – 2020’s ‘Obey’ and ‘Happier’, which dropped in October.

To put it another way, this live performer is being recognised, and accepted by some of rock’s most prominent voices – so it’s no skin off his nose if you’re in or not. But if you are, you’ll be in the presence of a star who comes dangerously close to blowing the entire roof off every venue he plays – you’re guaranteed to leave with a bit more fire and passion in your soul.

“I want to be here to eradicate hate from preconception. That’s what I’m here to do for everyone: for you, for me, for every fucker in here, and I want to make a difference in your life even if you know it or not,” he told Rolling Stone UK in 2023.

In adopting this mantra for his live performances, Yungblud is slowly but surely changing the world. ®

THE TRAILBLAZER AWARD

# DIGGA D

**Digga D is more than just a multi-headed hip-hop hydra breathing fire into the potent rap subgenre of UK drill, he's empowering the next generation of London rappers. Away from his music, he's an example of how a person's past does not dictate their future, having scored a number one album in 2022 and a top-10 mixtape this summer**

BY **Tracy Kawalik**

DRILL PIONEER DIGGA D is achieving global fame and making hip-hop history with an arsenal of bold bars that articulate the complexities of the world around him while inspiring the new wave of rappers and marginalised youth to fulfil their sonic potential.

Digga D's rise has been exponential. Since making headlines and seismic waves in the UK music scene in 2017, he's racked up half a billion global streams, released multiple top-10 tracks, been the subject of a BAFTA award-winning documentary, *Defending Digga D*, and last year he put out a number-one mixtape, *Noughty by Nature*, dethroning the likes of Ed Sheeran and Olivia Rodrigo from the top of the charts as he did so.

Fast-forward to 2023, and at 23 years old, he became the youngest rapper to headline the prestigious Royal Albert Hall, launched his own record label, Black Money Records, as well as a critically lauded fourth mixtape, *Back to Square One*. All of these achievements cement his music status and commitment to personal growth.

A beast with bars, Digga D flexes a staggering lyrical dexterity with a comic wink that outstrips most of his drill rap peers alongside battle tactics to leverage his talent with strategy and an otherworldly tenacity to rap through adversity.

He might have dropped out of school at 14, but Digga D is a class-leading graduate of the fiercely raw underground rap subgenre of drill. Since its inception in 2011, the genre has percolated through localised London communities, battled the forces of police censorship and mainstream media moral panic to rise up as a dominant, commercially viable musical force, and much of that formidable success is thanks to Digga D.

Rhys Angelo Emile Herbert, aka Digga D, was born in West London in the summer of 2000 to a Barbadian father and Jamaican mother. He spent his childhood going to Sunday school, and was raised on a diet of Caribbean sounds such as dancehall and bashment, and G-Unit-dominated US hip-hop. He was heavily influenced by future collaborator Vybz Kartel (and even let slip in recent interviews that he has a 5-track dancehall EP ready to go). His skills were prominent from an early age: at nine years old, Digga D rapped on stage in a battle at the Royal Albert Hall, and by 11, he had put pen to paper and began cutting his rap chops at The Harrow Club youth centre.

By 2017, he'd become frontman of 1011. Its moniker derived from two West London postcodes, the collective ignited the nascent drill scene with braggadocios taunts over skittish snares and menacing beats. Digga D was already gaining ferocious traction and attention, but his seminal 'Next Up?' freestyle for music platform Mixtape Madness became one of the most-watched drill videos and among the first music videos to be removed from YouTube by request of the Metropolitan police.

1011 was characterised by the Met as a criminal gang, and Digga D and other members were arrested for carrying machetes and baseball bats. The collective claimed they had been about to shoot a music video and rebranded as CGM – Cherish God More – but they were found guilty of conspiracy to commit a violent disorder, sent to prison and lambasted for inciting the upward spike in youth violence through their music. To its critics, it celebrated gang violence and crime. However, to its young fan base, it was a vehicle for expression.

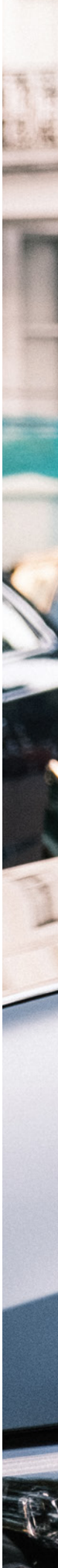
**"THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SEE ME FALL. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SEE ME GET TO THE TOP"**

***DIGGA D***

Digga D was handed a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) before his 18th birthday, restricting his performance of songs like 'Next Up?', who he hangs out with and where he goes, while his creative output is heavily censored. His lyrics must be cleared by the Met within 24 hours of release until 2025.

While the original 'Next Up?' remains in police custody, the recent remix has surpassed 100 million





streams while co-signs continue to flood in from rap critics like Joseph JP Patterson who said it "stopped everyone in their tracks. Heads in the music industry began to turn, and they quickly found themselves in 'next to blow' conversations". Ethan Herlock of *The Face* said of the track that it "demonstrated Digga D's distinctive flow and chest-puffing energy, heralding him as a standout MC in the increasingly crowded UK drill scene".

Thankfully, Digga was born to make music and battle for his passion. In 2019, he put out the incendiary debut mixtape *Double Tap Diaries* from jail, with a corresponding music video that garnered 1.6 million views in five days and today has over 20 million, landed a shout-out from Stormzy and even featured in an Instagram post by Zac Efron.

He made deeper in-roads across the pond in 2020 with 'Woi', a string of chart-topping singles and clout-clocking freestyle that built up to his second mixtape, *Made in the Pyrex* in 2021, which was cited by the Official Charts as the "highest charting project to date for a millennium-born UK rapper, and the highest-charting independent UK Drill project on the Official Chart so far".

His success continued when he topped the album charts with *Noughty by Nature* in 2022, and scored a top-six chart position for his latest mixtape, *Back to Square One*, the first full-length release from his own label.

Digga D's success and perseverance highlight the contradiction that encapsulates his unique ascendance and the draconian systems trying to block it. He reflected on the past few years in BBC documentary *Defending Digga D*. "There's a lot of people who want to see me fall," he said. "But at the same time, there's a lot of people who want to see me get to the top."

Perseverance, determination and a dedication to transforming his life have made Digga D a worthy recipient of the first Trailblazer Award.

**GUEST LIST**
(From left) Emily Roberts,Lizzie Mayland, Georgia Davies, Aurora Nischevi and Abigail Morris

THE RISING STAR AWARD

SUPPORTED BY MOVING VENUE

# THE LAST DINNER PARTY

## The most exciting new band of 2023 discuss vision, evolution and their stunning debut album, *Prelude to Ecstasy*

BY **Will Richards** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Cal McIntyre**

THE LAST DINNER Party knew what they wanted to be from the very start. When I meet the band before the second of their two gigs at Hackney's EartH venue, under their orders, a line of fans in distinctive fancy dress has already emerged out front. The five-piece, who have been a band for four years but playing gigs for only two of those, have a command over – and dialogue with – their audience of the kind that most artists never achieve in their entire careers. From a word-of-mouth success to becoming 2023's most exciting new band – and winners of The Rising Star Award, supported by Moving Venue – they enter 2024 as a group with the world at their feet.

Before even having their first rehearsal together as a band, the five members – vocalist Abigail Morris, guitarists Lizzie Mayland and Emily Roberts, bassist Georgia Davies and keys player Aurora Nischevi – had already pinned down a defined aesthetic for the project, which they viewed as just as important as the music. For their first gig at The George Tavern in London in November 2021, they gave themselves a dress code (Princess Diana in an American Apparel advert) and emerged as a fully formed audio-visual experience.

"I wanted to start out strong by establishing what we're about," Morris tells me in the EartH dressing room ahead of the second show. "We're going to dress up, we're going to have themed shows – it's going to be more than just people standing and playing, and we're gonna act like we're doing something on a much larger scale."

Rewind two years from the gig at The George, and the band had already amassed a host of songs since forming in 2019 but had delayed performing live because of their aversion to the idea of seated or distanced lockdown performances. "I remember saying to you guys, 'Let's not do a gig until people can stand up,'" Davies recalls. "'I don't want to play to a roomful of people with masks, six feet away from each other.'"

**"WE NEVER PUT PRESSURE ON OURSELVES TO RECORD STUFF. WE REALLY ADMIRE THOSE BANDS WHO YOU NEVER HEARD ANYTHING FROM UNTIL YOU SAW THEM LIVE"**

**DAVIES**

"It was frustrating at the time but kind of a blessing," Morris adds. "It meant we had so much time to really come out fully formed." When the band did emerge with such a defined style and an arsenal of fleshed-out material, some in the music industry raised eyebrows as to their origins. Unlike many bands who evolve and change from scrappy beginners with half-formed ideas into something more complete, The Last Dinner Party were ahead of the game from the beginning. Far from being a cynical marketing exercise, it was the marker of a band with a crystal-clear artistic vision and the bravery to take their time until they were ready.

"We never really put pressure on ourselves to record stuff," Davies says. "That was always a secondary priority to playing live. We really admire those bands who you never heard anything from until you saw them live, the old-school way of doing it."

The most prominent example of this in recent memory is Black Midi, who were hailed as the most exciting new band in the UK before they even released debut single 'bmbmbm' in the summer of 2019. In a truly rare phenomenon in the internet age, bootleg recordings of their gigs at the Brixton Windmill were passed around like a furtive secret. You actually *had* to see them live. "I managed to get a CD demo that they'd left in a kebab shop!" says Davies, laughing. "They said, 'OK, you can hear our music, but you have to go to this kebab shop in east London!' I showed up like, 'Can I have a Black Midi and some chips please?!'"

Taking cues from this anti-internet approach to launching a band, Morris adds: "There was a big period where the normal thing that an artist would do is put out music on their own before even playing a live show, and the fans would come from TikTok or YouTube. Now, people are just really hungry for live bands, live performances and finding something in the real world."

At the EartH show, it's immediately clear why the band had such an aversion to the idea of a seated or Covid-distanced gig; their live performance hinges on sweaty connection and the breaking down of barriers. Their fans – who rabidly adhere to dress codes which have thus far included Folk Horror, Velvet Goldmine, A Night at the Opera and more – know the unreleased songs off by heart from attending multiple gigs or scouring YouTube and buy into the whole concept of The Last Dinner Party universe as much as the band themselves.

Throughout the show, Morris is a bewitching frontwoman, twirling and dancing one second before launching herself into the faces of the front row the next. Behind her, Roberts becomes a guitar hero for a new era, playing a signature St. Vincent guitar and throwing out the same kind of vicious solos that Annie Clark made her name with. It's a performance that is both intense and anthemic, with the new songs aired showing a greater breadth of sound and a band brimming with energy and charisma, fully seizing their moment.

When The Last Dinner Party finally emerged this April with debut single 'Nothing Matters', four years after their formation and 18 months since that first post-lockdown live show, the response was rapturous. A dramatic, catchy and raucous opening statement, it established Morris as a charismatic and thoughtful vocalist from the jump, taking cues from Kate Bush and David Bowie but presenting a singular voice at the same time. Its video saw the band dressed like a funeral from a period drama, establishing a clear and vivid aesthetic. "Wait... this is your debut

**WAIT ON YOU**
The band delayed their live debut

**VISION**
Their image is integral

single?" the video's top YouTube comment reads, such was the level of accomplishment and ambition on display.

Later in the year, they followed up with second single 'Sinner', a track both catchier and at times heavier than its predecessor. High on drama, it tells the story of a loss of innocence while longing for a time with simpler priorities and emotions: "*I wish I knew you before it felt like a sin*." Later in the song, they break into a rapturous, transcendent backing vocal which melts into a shredded guitar solo. This heaviness is explored further on third single 'My Lady of Mercy', which has tinges of Queens of the Stone Age in its sludgy chorus.

"There is so much music online, and it's difficult to digest," Nischevi says. "If we released the whole album as soon as we recorded it, it'd be too much. Releasing singles gives people time to live with that and get ready for a bigger body of work."

That will arrive in February in the form of debut album *Prelude to Ecstasy*. Recorded with James Ford (Arctic Monkeys, Florence + The Machine, Gorillaz and more) in the famous Church Studios in Crouch End, it expands upon the world built through the band's formative live shows while keeping hold of the special energy created at those gigs. "He was a great fit because he's not a producer that feels like he needs to put his stamp on things," Mayland says. "He's not trying to make it 'a James Ford record'. He's just so brilliant. He elevates it to a place that we never thought it could go."

For Morris, the album isn't a conceptual piece of work like The Last Dinner Party as a whole, but representative of "an elevated honesty". She says: "The lyrics, the music, the way we look – none of it is an act or a character. It's all us, but in our platonic form rather than a Ziggy Stardust-type of character. It's us at our full capacity."

Among the new tracks on the album is 'On Your Side', the band's most uncomplicated, pure declaration of love yet. "*When it's 4am and your heart is breaking*," Morris sings with visceral emotion, "*I will hold your hands to stop them from shaking*." Elsewhere, 'Portrait of a Dead Girl' has a grandeur reminiscent of Queen with a dash of Wolf Alice's rock'n'roll snarl.

Throughout, Morris inhabits characters, tells stories and interrogates her own emotions with the ability and thoughtfulness of a songwriter decades into their career. Maybe most striking is 'Beautiful Boy', a flute-assisted slow jam about a friend of the singer's. "I had a really clear thing that I wanted to say," she recalls.

"It's about a friend of mine, who is a very beautiful boy, and I remember I was talking to him once, and he was describing a holiday he had gone on on his own, where he just went off, hitchhiking around Spain. He lost his phone, had nothing – he was just relying on the kindness of strangers. Wherever he went, everyone adored him and took him in and gave him things, and it just made me think, 'What's it like to go around life being an exquisite man?'

"When you're a beautiful woman, it's a different thing that has a different kind of privilege, and also comes with its own horrors," Morris adds. "Being a normal man has a different set of privileges, but what is it like to be not only a man, but a man that's so beautiful no one would ever say no to you? He came to one of our gigs once, stole a bottle of rum from the venue, got caught, but then got let off because, and I quote, 'What a handsome thief!'"

SUCH WAS THE clarity of the artistic vision presented by The Last Dinner Party from the off that the band were inevitably boxed into certain corners. "We were seeing some interviews, even from the very start, where people would say, '*Pride and Prejudice*, *Bridgerton*, corsets!' And that's one aspect of what we like, but very quickly we realised that we don't want to just be that one thing. We want to be able to do stuff that's more modernist alongside that and keep evolving."

For Morris, the present and future of The Last Dinner Party isn't slowly moving towards a final form, but allowing themselves to change and grow, incorporating different styles and aesthetics and sounds while maintaining their core DNA. "We are what we are in each fully realised bit of the band's history, and each fully realised bit will be different than the last one."

"You want a thumbprint on all your music," Nischevi offers. "A lot of the best artists, and the ones that stand the test of time, all have their thumbprint on everything, but they've also had a whole career's worth of development and change. In among all of that, there's something that's cohesive about all of it. There's something special in that." ®

THE ARTIST AWARD

IN COLLABORATION WITH RÉMY MARTIN

# JESSIE WARE

**A chart-topping album, a Mercury Music Prize nomination, sold-out gigs, a hit podcast and a new TV role prove that this multi-disciplinary artist is ready to spread her wings**

BY **Cliff Joannou** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Mark Cant**

AFTER THE SUPERLATIVE club-ready sounds of *What's Your Pleasure?* won her a legion of new fans when the record was released during the first Covid lockdown in 2020, Jessie Ware returned three years later with its decadent progeny, the soul-infused *That! Feels Good!*.

The top-three charting record gave Ware the best reviews of her career while scoring a solid Metacritic rating of 89 out of 100, deservedly earning the artist her second Mercury Music Prize nomination.

Looking to the likes of Earth, Wind & Fire, Grace Jones, Prince, Donna Summer, Diana Ross, Chaka Khan, Rotary Connection and Tina Marie to infuse this new direction, Ware's fifth album is a seamless body of work that glides effortlessly from blissful, 70s-inspired grooves to sassy, contemporised disco beats. Each track is gloriously distinct from the next, yet the body of work maintains an elegant cohesiveness that concept albums often fall short of.

"I feel the most confident I've ever felt, stepping into making music," says Ware of bringing *That! Feels Good!* to life. "I really wanted to celebrate the beauty of an album, and what an album can represent. I really appreciate the traction I get off streaming sites, and all of that. It's amazing, don't get me wrong. But the romantic in me wanted that person to put this album on their vinyl and just listen to it. And that's it. I want to be able to cherish that experience and savour that."

The remarkable production that runs across the album's ten tracks is set aflame by the chic seductiveness of Ware's incomparable vocals, pushed to new heights throughout the record – most notably on the Stuart Price-produced second single, 'Pearls'. "I was like, 'Fuck, I really hope that I can do it live,'" Ware told Rolling Stone UK of her first live performance of the song for BBC Radio 2's *Piano Room* sessions. "Of course, I sing live, but it's that new thing of... you sing it once in the studio, maybe twice, if you're kind of redoing it. But being able to have that muscle memory, being able to practise it, that's something else." Ware needn't have worried – she effortlessly nailed the high notes during the recording session with the BBC Orchestra at its Maida Vale studios.

Ware produced the faultless record with just two teams: working for the first time with the brilliant Stuart Price alongside Clarence Coffee Jr on four of the tracks; and long-standing collaborators James Ford, Shungudzo Kuyimba and Daniel Parker on production duties across the other six. "We have such a kind of open, beautiful relationship. I trust them implicitly. I love our conversations. I love the worlds that we create," Ware told Rolling Stone UK of their creative synergy. "Shun is a master with words and poetry. Our chemistry together, it just works. It's like the Holy Trinity when it comes to making my best music. I think we'll work together for my whole career," Ware adds of her writing partners Kuyimba and Parker.

The renewed confidence on the singer-songwriter's record was amplified on her sold-out US and UK tours and festival appearances. *That! Feels Good!* is a reminder of why Ware has won universal praise over the past ten or more years of her career, from those more hedonistic early days working with Disclosure, Julio Bashmore and Sampha to recent collaborations with another queen of dance and pop, Kylie Minogue.

Ahead of releasing her fifth album, Ware put her voice to radio when she presented BBC Radio 2's evening show during Jo Whiley's absence, while away from music she also served a tenth season of hit podcast *Table Manners*, recorded alongside her mother Lennie. Boasting more than 50 million listens, the latest run features another eclectic guest list: Miriam Margolyes and Noel Gallagher swung by her kitchen to share their food favourites, as did Keir Starmer. Her growing profile saw her close the year as a judge alongside Amber Riley on ITV talent show *Mamma Mia! I Have a Dream*, which marks the musical's 25th anniversary with a search for its next star.

**"I REALLY WANTED TO CELEBRATE THE BEAUTY OF AN ALBUM, AND WHAT AN ALBUM CAN REPRESENT"**

**I**

***WARE***

It all makes Ware a worthy recipient of The Artist Award, in collaboration with Rémy Martin. From clubland to concert hall stages, via podcasts to TV and radio presenting, wherever the road takes Jessie Ware next, there's no doubt that this multi-disciplinary artist has only just begun to hit her stride.

THE SONG OF THE YEAR AWARD

# A VERY BRITISH SUPERSTAR

**After acclimatising to instant fame, PinkPantheress, the singer-songwriter-producer behind 'Boy's a Liar Pt. 2', is confidently laying down her boundaries and refusing to conform to expectations — as she releases her most adventurous work yet**

BY **Natty Kasambala**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Jeff Hahn** FASHION DIRECTION BY **Joseph Kocharian** STYLING BY **Milena Agbaba**

**PREVIOUS PAGE**

PINKPANTHERESS WEARS TOP BY **MIU MIU**, BIKINI BY **KORARU**, JEWELLERY BY **SHAUNE LEANE + MESSIKA**, SILVER RING AND PAVÉ DIAMOND RING (LEFT, RING FINGER) BY **886 BY THE ROYAL MINT**

**THIS PAGE**

PINKPANTHERESS WEARS TOP BY **POSTER GIRL**, SHOES AND JEANS FROM **MILKA ARCHIVE**, JEWELLERY BY **MESSIKA**, PAVÉ DIAMOND RING (RIGHT) BY **886 BY THE ROYAL MINT**

PINKPANTHERESS LETS OUT a quiet groan as we approach the pier. We seem to have noticed in unison that we are the only Black people around, maybe for miles; we're also the youngest people in the queue we join, by at least 35 years. It's 4pm on a Wednesday, and we're in Kew Gardens in southwest London, preparing to board a riverboat cruise down the Thames. "I love doing an activity," she says, in a tone so deadpan it almost sounds sarcastic. "I actually wanted to go see *Magic Mike [Live]* today, but I didn't end up getting tickets."

The perpetually viral singer-songwriter-producer is just in from LA, where she lives part of the time, and is already kind of wishing she was back there. "London's not that exciting to me anymore," she says with an apologetic grimace.

Raised in the suburbs of Kent, PinkPantheress, 22, was drawn to London from an early age, and moved there as soon as she could, for university. When she was propelled to notoriety a few years back, she was still studying film – one of many young people robbed of the full student experience by the pandemic. But it was that forced confinement that gave her extra time to experiment with music. She recorded at home, mostly on GarageBand, challenging herself to consistently put snippets of songs out into the world. (PinkPantheress was her TikTok username.) "Day 2 of posting my song until someone notices it," she wrote in the text accompanying an early TikTok. And then, at first gradually and then seemingly all at once, without uttering her birth name or initially showing her entire face, suddenly, millions of people did notice.

In 2021, PinkPantheress released her debut mixtape, *To Hell with It*, 19 minutes of melodies, samples and reinterpretations of house, drum-and-bass and cybercore soundscapes about teenage tribulations: loneliness, family conflict, crashing your car and failing your A-levels. From there, things kept taking off: she scored spots on blockbuster soundtracks – *Wakanda Forever* and *Barbie* – and collaborated with Willow Smith, Skrillex, Kaytranada, Troye Sivan, Destroy Lonely and Ice Spice, who joined her for 'Boy's a Liar Pt. 2'. The latter hit is her biggest track to date, amassing more than a billion streams – which is why it is the winner of The Song of the Year Award at the Rolling Stone UK Awards in collaboration with Rémy Martin.

Though her bite-size tracks (and concerts) have been known to speed past you with the headiness of a sugar rush, PinkPantheress is in it for the long haul, harnessing her TikTok-farmed momentum into a four-dimensional career. Her recently released debut album, *Heaven Knows*, is all about growth – both personally and artistically. In this new patchwork, you might find a riff on Oxlade's Afrobeats hit 'Ku Lo Sa', hefty gothic organ chords, lengthy rock-guitar solos, strings, or the sound of thunderous rain. Collaborators include Greg Kurstin, Mura Masa and Cash Cobain, among others. "It was hard to let go of drum'n'bass, but..." she says a little wistfully, looking off into the distance for a second before snapping back. "It wasn't, actually – it was so easy. I just realised I had to mature lyrically and do things like sampling in a different way. We've got more guitars in there, more live instruments."

Even with some of her defining references disappearing in the rearview mirror, the PinkPantheress sound still has the same singular, addictive essence, I tell her. "Essence," she agrees, emphasising the sibilance in the word a few more times. "That's true. Every artist I love has an essence... You just can't mistake their songs [for anyone else], even if they use multiple genres. Someone like Lily [Allen], even aside from her singing voice, you always know it's her because of the subject matter, or the tone, or the vibe of the instrumental. Some artists are really smart at being able to kind of pack their stuff up in a suitcase and then unload it onto a new track."

So, what's in her carry-on? "I think with my essence there's a constant underlying sadness, even when the lyrics aren't sad. [It's] also one of hope and lost hope and, like, grey... My essence was very inspired by Britain. There's a certain feeling that I feel like none of us can really put our fingers on when it comes to being here." If she had to try to describe it, it's somewhere between watching *Skins* and having a dirty kind of feeling – "like eurgh," she offers. "I was listening to The Streets the other day, and they have the best way of adding an essence into all of [their] songs that just makes me feel so depressed and like life is so shit!" Though her words sound grim, her delivery of them is complimentary, verging on relief, like the satisfaction of scratching a particularly stubborn itch in that distinctly British way we have of delighting in our own misery.

**"EVERY ARTIST I LOVE HAS AN ESSENCE... WITH MY ESSENCE, THERE'S A CONSTANT UNDERLYING SADNESS, EVEN WHEN THE LYRICS AREN'T SAD"**

***PINKPANTHERESS***

PinkPantheress's music carries a similar tension, with lyrics often teetering on the edge of darkness, but delivered with sweetness and playful production that seems to unburden you from the weight of those problems, or at least create a space where for a few minutes they don't matter. If anything, spending more time in the land of palm trees and permanent summer may have added a sprinkle of bliss to the bleakness: "That's the thing. Previous to this album, I'd never recorded anywhere else but London, so that's new, and probably why the songs do sound different. But I can never lose the Britishness in me."

*Heaven Knows* started out as an ode to those beginnings, she tells me. "I actually wanted [this album] to sound like classic Brit pop, and then it ended up turning into something I actually don't know how to categorise. Like, I have no idea. I guess it's alt-pop," she offers. Genre has always been a tricky subject when it comes to PinkPantheress. When she first emerged, many listeners took the opportunity to point out her influences – from jungle to drum'n'bass to garage especially. Her success became an overdue reason to

spotlight the rich history of electronic music and club culture in the UK. She took on that mantle gracefully, citing her inspirations and samples across interviews, dissecting the significance of Y2K culture for her generation, and giving flowers where flowers were due.

Today, she stands firmer than ever in the place she created for herself, rooted in something far deeper than just nostalgia: "When people say, 'Oh, she's not original,' or 'She hasn't done anything different,' or 'I've heard artists like her before,' they can never name me a single one. Because even if you name people back in the 2000s, they didn't really sound like me, and I don't sound like them." Of course, she has inspirations, but today they're more eclectic than you might guess – Imogen Heap's openhearted, whimsical storytelling, Grace Jones's decades-long career, Lily Allen's inimitable voice. "I think people forget that music is more than just the beat... Unless you're finding someone that uses this type of beat, and writes about the same thing that I do, and in the same melodic way that I do, then I am the first person you've heard make this kind of music."

PinkPantheress's narratives feel as if they're plucked directly from her own subconscious, stretched out into fully fledged fantasy tales. "Back in the day, in some cases, I would actually act that shit out," she says. I picture a teenage Pink – the shortened version of her stage name – playing out daydream scenarios in her bedroom, like manifestation meets drama class. "When I found out [maladaptive daydreaming] was quite common," she says, "I thought, 'OK, phew.'"

On the *Heaven Knows* standout 'Another Life', she tells someone in her casual singsong, "*I guess I'll see you in another life*," over an energetic house beat bookended by ominous organs. 'Nice to Meet You' opens with a plea – "*I pray that I'll die before my baby / I'll take a risk if anyone tries to touch my baby, that's my love*" – as a drum'n'bass beat rumbles and then breaks right alongside her. "I was imagining dating someone rich and famous, and it was meant to be about basically being protected by your partner," she explains. "I have a lot of songs that are like 'I didn't get the man of my dreams,' but this one was 'OK, I have you now, and I love you so much. You're protecting me.'"

On 'Mosquito', the lead single from *Heaven Knows*, PinkPantheress philosophises on money, possessions, and the enduring grip of capitalism. "I don't know why I have such a thing about money. I think it's because when I grew up, I really didn't have it a lot," she says. "I'm just so frugal now... Sometimes I feel like I'm just sailing through and then something's gonna go wrong and I'm going to be like..." She silently replicates the *Home Alone* shocked face.

It's that all-too-familiar survival instinct kicking in, of waiting for the other shoe to drop when things are going well. Her only guilty pleasure, she admits, is bags; she's sporting a mini brown-leather barrel Telfar today, which is hardly unrelatable. Dressed unassumingly in a pair of black leggings and a plain black top with fluffy moon boots, at a glance, there's very little to distinguish her from any other twentysomething girl next door. Then she drops in, "Although I'm thinking I might get a Tesla, because why not?" And we come crashing back down to her very unique reality. "I was actually so convinced I was going to marry someone rich [growing up], so that I would be stable," she says. "But now that I found it myself, I think I just feel like there's so much pressure for me to keep it."

**"WHEN PEOPLE SAY, 'I'VE HEARD ARTISTS LIKE HER BEFORE,' THEY CAN NEVER NAME A SINGLE ONE. EVEN IF YOU NAME PEOPLE IN THE 2000S, I DON'T SOUND LIKE THEM"**

***PINKPANTHERESS***

THOUGH INNER-CITY LONDON has lost some of its shine for PinkPantheress, today, under clear blue skies, we nonetheless stop at multiple points on the cruise to soak up the riverside scenery. The first time we met, in 2021, she was excited about moving into a house with friends and decorating her first 'grown-up' bedroom. Since then, she's been able to get her own base, splitting her time between there and a place in LA. (She made sure she has roommates in both though, because "sometimes you need people to remind you of your age.") Back then, filming her first-ever video interview (on the set of her second-ever music video), she was good-natured and accommodating, having spent the better part of a year operating facelessly from the deep, dark corners of the internet. But there was an underlying awkwardness around the mechanisms of this newfound fame. Her face had already been "revealed" publicly, but at certain points between takes, you might catch a thought flash over it that read something like 'What have I got myself into now?'

We met for the second time in 2022, during her first-ever tour. PinkPantheress was encountering the biggest real-world consequences yet of her explosive arrival: sold-out venues, late nights, jet-setting and seas of iPhones littering her unsurprisingly eclectically dressed crowds, fans who waited for her by the stage door, just as she'd once waited for her own musical heroes.

But beyond that, at each stage, there's been a sense of phenomena that's only been outdone by the next chapter, and this phase doesn't feel any different. Come to think of it, every time I've met PinkPantheress, it's felt like she was at some kind of juncture, about to unlock the next level of a game.

For a minute, we're distracted by a cohort of rowers who glide past us somewhere in Chiswick. Staring off at them, she mutters, "It's really crazy that people choose to do that." We picked the front deck for optimal views but are vulnerable to the elements, and a small battle bubbles up between PinkPantheress, the wind, and one defiant eyelash. She reconfigures it every minute or so without complaint, but after a particularly strong gust, finally breaks when I offer her a mirror from my bag, laughing and saying, "Please, please!" Later she admits, "I never like making big deals out of anything."

While the language of her music can border on the

PINKPANTHERESS
WEARS JACKET BY
**PHOEBE PENDERGAST**

theatrical, her real-life demeanour is far more low-key and grounded, even when talking about the most absurd parts of her journey so far: climbing up the pop charts or being stopped in the street by fans, say, or even the hearing loss she suffered last year while on tour, which she notes with a simple "Alas, we move." In person, she's taller and chattier, and somehow even less fazed by it all than you'd expect.

Like many of our biggest internet success stories – Lil Nas X, Doja Cat, Billie Eilish – PinkPantheress's digital fluency stemmed from a childhood dedicated to fandoms of her own. She had a "rawr xD" emo phase to rival the best of us, even running a rock band Instagram fan page as a teenager before her focus shifted to K-pop. And these kinds of communities are only gaining momentum in their feverish engagement with and relation to the artists they champion. For evidence of that, you only have to browse the comment section of one of her viral clips on TikTok to find hordes of fans fiending for more content, more releases, more of her.

Yet, despite – or perhaps because of – her hyper-online origins, PinkPantheress has managed to draw

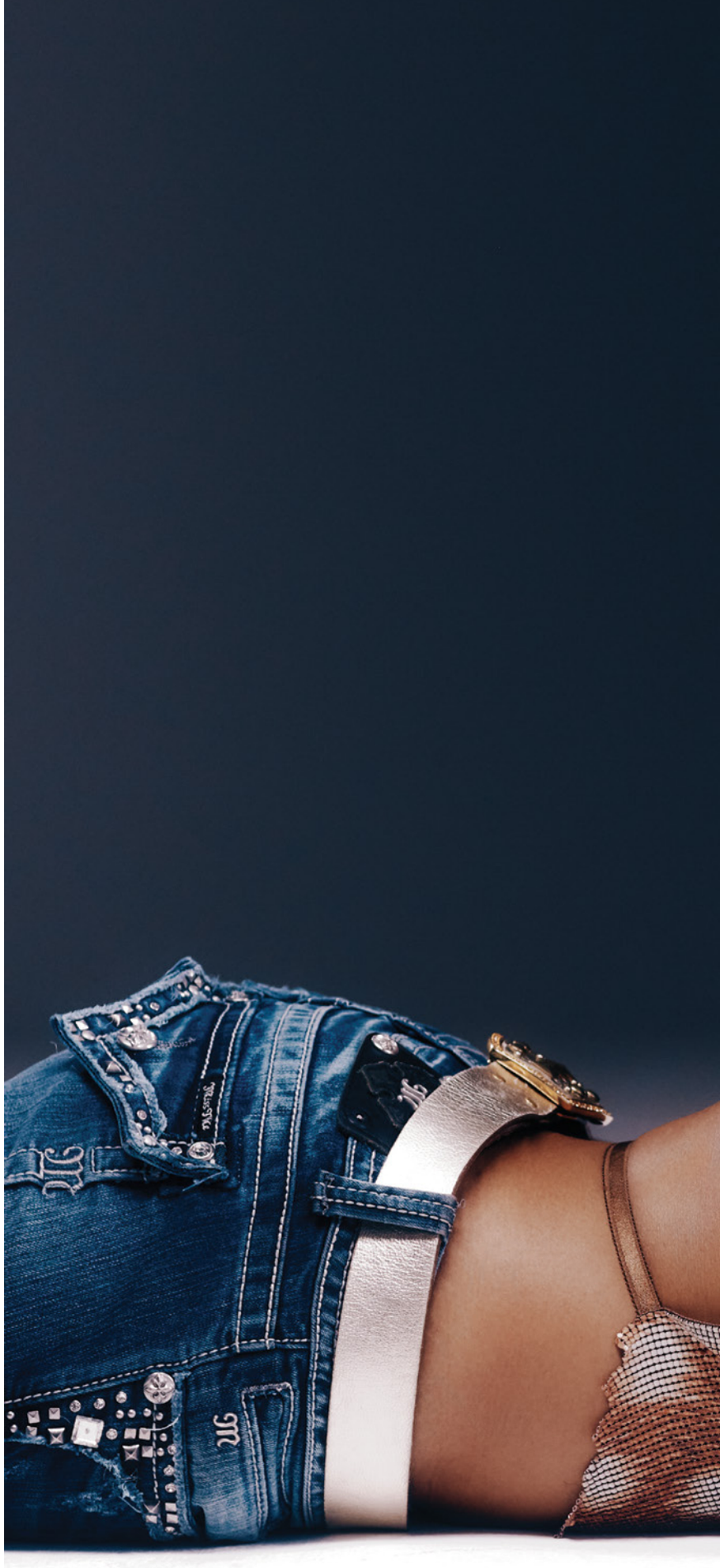
**"I DIDN'T LIKE PEOPLE KNOWING ABOUT MY NAME. IT WAS PURELY JUST, 'WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE TO KNOW THAT?'"**

***PINKPANTHERESS***

a clear line between her personhood and her artistry; even the dissonance between her petite, airy, high-pitched singing voice and the husky animated alto she speaks with feels symbolic. "I've always been super private, even in school," she says. She credits this in part to her Kenyan mother (her father is British). "It's probably to do with the way I was raised, too," she says, "with my mum being Kenyan and me learning a lot about Kenyan values, African values. I don't know if you got this, but my mum just taught me that you can actually keep things to yourself."

For the whole first leg of her come up, including a series of massive singles and a major-label record deal, no one even knew what she looked like. Even after revealing her full face, images of her remained scarce and were often shrouded in a mysterious gothic or virtual fog, which felt like a shield of sorts.

Then there was the speculation around her birth name – something she wanted to hold close at the start of her career, not understanding its relevance to her music. "I didn't like people knowing about my name, but it wasn't even because I was trying to hide or because I was nervous. It was purely just, 'Why do people have to know that?'"



PINKPANTHERESS WEARS TOP BY **POSTER GIRL**, JEANS FROM **MILKA ARCHIVE**, JEWELLERY BY **MESSIKA**, SILVER RING BY **886 BY THE ROYAL MINT**

PINKPANTHERESS WEARS TOP BY **TANK AIR**, SKIRT BY **SANNA PATRICK**, JEWELLERY BY **SHAUN LEANE**

MAKEUP BY **DANIELLE KAHLANI**, USING **REN CLEAN SKINCARE**

HAIR BY **ANASTASIA STYLIANOU** AT THE ARCH AGENCY, USING **GHD**

ON-SET FASHION ASSISTANT **AARON PANDHER**

As she got more and more coverage, rumours swirled and people refused to let it go, insisting on trying to connect the dots. "My mum told me my whole life, 'Your birth name is your given right,'" she says. "'That's why you have an English name and an African name, because your name is so sacred to you.' So, I thought, 'Why do I owe you a name?' But the first tabloid that posted it, they took it by force."

Since then, she's progressed from anonymity to where she is today through a series of deliberate choices, driven only by her own increasing confidence. "The visibility has to come when you're ready," she explains. "And if you do it before you're ready, it can literally break you."

In past interviews, PinkPantheress has mentioned a journey with body dysmorphia and the challenge of having to relinquish so much control over your image once you enter the public sphere. Nowadays, she's in a better place with that aspect of celebrity, though when it comes up during our interview, it's the first time that she appears to be apprehensive all day, combing through her thoughts in stops and starts before landing on her point. "Before this year, I just hated how I looked," she says. "I feel better about the way I look now because I've kind of just accepted it. And it's made me more willing to enter myself into this world now as opposed to holding back."

There's this gulf between her self-perception and the external chorus of voices fawning over her doe-eyed beauty, but it's a stark reminder that so many of these battles stem from the internal. On her Rolling Stone UK cover shoot, later that week, she is leaps and bounds more confident than the first time we met, even if she still assesses the shots between looks, fidgeting absent-mindedly or going quiet while clicking through photos that, if they were of me, I would have framed and sent to the houses of all of my enemies.

Averaging about two posts a year on an Instagram account with more than 1.5 million followers and generally leading a pretty offline existence, PinkPantheress has managed to maintain a healthy amount of mystery and normality around herself, mostly thanks to setting boundaries. "Honestly, I think it's got something to do with gender," she says. "For some reason, girls are expected to share everything."

It's true: these days it seems our female stars are required to moonlight as influencers and media personalities, adopting an always-on approach to social media to keep a grip on their portion of young audiences' attention, or at the very least to sell a certain lifestyle or idea. Instead, PinkPantheress is watching the male artists at the top of their game, noticing their ability to take an exclusive approach to social media. "Frank Ocean doesn't post anything, and he's the coolest person out there," she says, shrugging. "I'm not anything close to him, but I'm just saying I'm learning from the rule book of some of the people I look up to, and pretty much all the people I look up to are people that are private."

That hasn't always been an easy road, either. For women, the limelight comes with a certain expectation – or worse, a condition – that in exchange for our support, you have to be willing to bare all (in more senses than one). "I've had people ask online, 'She's got an arse, why doesn't she just show it?'" PinkPantheress says. "I've always said if you're a Black female [artist], you're expected to sing really well, or you're expected to dance really well, or rap really well. It's those three things, or you have to have a perfect body, be 'in check', and basically be a model, or you might as well leave," she says with more than a hint of sarcasm. "And I think that's why a lot of people say, 'Why isn't she bigger than she is?' And to be fair, you have to remind them sometimes [that] you're coming through as a Black female artist making alternative music, not even pop necessarily, who hails from the UK, who doesn't really post pictures of herself online, who dresses a type of way that people aren't used to. It's like, 'What do you expect?'

"Some people watch me live and think I'm shocking," she continues, laughing with an unforced lightness. "And I can't dance! So, honestly, I'm surprised that I'm even here, with the way that I don't move the way people want me to. And I'm happy, I'm so happy. Because at the end of the day, I can't pretend to be someone I'm not, I can't pretend to do any of that."

**"IF YOU'RE A BLACK FEMALE [ARTIST], YOU'RE EXPECTED TO SING REALLY WELL, OR DANCE REALLY WELL, OR RAP REALLY WELL — OR YOU HAVE TO HAVE A PERFECT BODY"**

***PINKPANTHERESS***

These days, she's made peace with the by-products of fame, though she still hears from people telling her that her dad – a statistics professor – is their lecturer. "I wonder how much hassle he actually gets, because he makes it sound like he gets people actually hassling him," she says, laughing.

Her unconventional uphill rise is its own proof of concept. "When people try to use stuff like, 'Oh, she's only here because of the way she looks,' which I've read before, I'm like, 'Well, you didn't even know what I looked like when my first three singles came out so ...'" As a result, PinkPantheress sits comfortably in the knowledge that no matter what she's wrestling with or who she goes on to become next, her music has already spoken for itself. That's what got her here. She smiles in agreement, "I don't know if it's the universe or what, but the fact that I had that, doing it that way, was the best thing that ever happened to me."

As the boat docks, PinkPantheress is again thinking about *Magic Mike Live*, admitting that she's actually already been once. Ahead, she spots the captain helping passengers step off the boat by grabbing each person's arm quite enthusiastically. She winces jokingly: "I think he's going to try and touch me."

Managing to slip past unscathed, PinkPantheress goes on to tell her publicist Mo that she should come with her to see the show. Now, at bustling street level in the centre of London at rush hour, as we're saying our goodbyes, Mo asks, "What are you going to do if they try to get you up onstage for a dance?"

Pink smiles and replies, "They do ask you," putting on a sultry American accent, "'Do I have your consent?'" But she shrugs off the thought with ease, before slipping away into a waiting blacked-out van. "I'll just say no."

THE GAMECHANGER AWARD

# LEWIS CAPALDI

**The global balladeer has earned a place in our hearts not only for his soulbaring tunes, but also for his honesty and bravery in sharing the challenges of living with Tourette's**

BY **Nick Reilly**

ALEXANDRA GAVILLET, GETTY IMAGES

"I REALLY APOLOGISE," CAME the frank admission from Lewis Capaldi as he stood on Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage this summer, looking out at one of the weekend's biggest crowds.

"You've all come out, and my voice is really packing in. We're gonna play two more songs if that's cool, even if I can't hit all the notes."

In front of thousands of fans, Lewis Capaldi bravely showed the reality of what it's like to be overwhelmed by an episode of Tourette's syndrome, a neurological condition which causes a person to make involuntary sounds and movements called tics.

For the way he's shone a light on the condition and used his global platform to show how he lives with Tourette's on a daily basis, we can think of no better person than Lewis Capaldi to win The Gamechanger Award at the first-ever Rolling Stone UK Awards, in collaboration with Rémy Martin, that was held at the Camden Roundhouse.

The singer, who was diagnosed with the condition last year, also showed that Tourette's sufferers aren't alone either. As he fought his way through 'Someone You Loved', the song that shot him to global fame, he was joined by the entire crowd, who sang the track back to him at earth-shattering volume. They had Capaldi's back throughout the performance and even sung for him during the moments when he was simply unable to do so.

Another person who has Capaldi's back is Bryony Munro, a 24-year-old dance teacher from Scotland who was first diagnosed with Tourette's in 2021. Prior to her diagnosis, she spent years experiencing tics and often faced torment from people who failed to understand her condition and, in some cases, even accused her of faking it.

She says that Capaldi's performance – as well as his frank discussion of the condition in the Netflix documentary *How I'm Feeling Now* – will revolutionise the way that Tourette's is regarded in the UK.

"Tourette's doesn't have to hold me back and Lewis is showing that," Bryony tells Rolling Stone UK. "I think it normalises it a bit, and it just kind of shows everyone that it's not just specific people that have tics. Lewis shows us that it can literally happen to anyone at any time but that it doesn't stop us living our lives. He's shown the reality of it and not just this whole stereotype of it being this person who swears all the time, because that isn't always true."

Recalling the moment she watched Capaldi's Glastonbury performance for the first time, Bryony says, "It was almost like an out-of-body experience.

**“I REALLY APOLOGISE. YOU’VE ALL COME OUT, AND MY VOICE IS PACKING IN. WE’RE GONNA PLAY TWO MORE SONGS IF THAT’S COOL, EVEN IF I CAN’T HIT ALL THE NOTES”**

**I**

***CAPALDI***

**WISH YOU THE BEST** Capaldi is a voice of a generation

I had no words, and I was just in shock at the way he was able to handle it and have the support of that crowd.”

Bryony also says that Capaldi’s post-Glastonbury decision to take a break to focus on his mental health and well-being could also have a monumental impact on the day-to-day existence of others who also live with Tourette’s.

“There was definitely a lack of education beforehand, and if you had Tourette’s and said to your employer that you needed a break, there’s every chance they wouldn’t understand. Lewis has given us a real kind of visibility and I guess that will lead to understanding in daily jobs too.”

When Lewis announced his hiatus, he said that it would ultimately allow him to “keep doing everything I love for a long time to come”.

Rest assured, we’ll be there when he chooses to make that return, raising a well-deserved glass to Lewis Capaldi, our magnificent gamechanger. Until then, we’ll keep his Buckfast on ice.

# FOR THAT BEAUTIFUL FEELING

THE ALBUM AWARD

SUPPORTED BY BROOKLANDS STUDIO

**As Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands approach their 35th anniversary as The Chemical Brothers, the pioneering electronic duo discuss their tenth record**

BY **Ben Jolley** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **Hamish Brown**

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS – aka Manchester-based electronic pioneers Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands – had a clear vision in mind when they started work on their tenth album, *For That Beautiful Feeling*, the winner of The Album Award, supported by Brooklands Studio. "We really wanted to embrace the idea of speaking very directly through music, because sometimes it's obscured quite a lot and scared of a big emotion," says Rowlands, as he and Simons speak to Rolling Stone UK backstage before their Birmingham Arena show.

Having said that, the pair didn't consciously intend to channel a particular set of ideas. Instead, they came naturally because of the time in which the record was made – during the first Covid-19 lockdown. Simons describes that period as "a strange time". "Whether it was the fear that came up, the pause in people's lives, or the loss, it's in there somewhere," he says of the songs that resulted from it.

Although the pair didn't set out to reflect that period in their music, a variety of emotions runs through many of the album's tracks. While Simons recognises that everyone had vastly different experiences of lockdown, there was one shared feeling: "missing the flow of life". He thinks that "coming back into a relationship with your life and with other people as it was" is something that people are still getting to grips with, even now. While this isn't a concept, he says that denying such influences, albeit subconscious ones, would be "strange and soulless".

Simons continues: "When we're playing some of these songs live, like April 2021's 'The Darkness That You Fear', which was released during that very strange time, you can feel in the air that it's hitting into something that is still being processed."

Another observation that came from playing live is the cohesion between their new album and 2019's *No Geography*. "Quite often, the album you make is a strong reaction to the last one," says Rowlands. "Sometimes, there's a real opposition to what you've just done, but this felt more like a continuation. The two albums seem to fit together quite well."

Despite creating the songs at a time when venues and clubs were shut, the pair were thinking about performing live when they were making the tracks. "That's the mind's-eye picture you have sometimes," says Rowlands, "a field of people responding to the music and the quality of it, the emotional tone, the sounds. It's an important part." Perhaps for this reason, the album veers between moments of introspection and catharsis. Whichever direction it's pulling in, however, there is a common thread at its core: "Some is very much about the shared experience of a good beat or a good sound, and what it can do to people," says Rowlands.

He describes the process of making music as being like a puzzle. "It's a maze," he begins. "You go down lots of different avenues and get lost, and you think it's the wrong way and you come back and it's all..."

Simons chimes in to succinctly clarify: "You retrace your steps."

Rowlands takes up the thread once more: "It's when you look at demo 512, from 2 March 2021, and think: 'Maybe there was something in that.'"

Rowlands and Simons have always worked by piecing everything together. "Often, the concept is found after you make the album," says Rowlands. "It's more a case of what was coming out of us. It's always a response to how you feel when you come into the studio – maybe it's a subconscious feeling that you want to express something, or maybe it was a time when you felt like you wanted to say something that moved you in some way."

They also enjoy the external stimulus that comes from collaborating with other artists. One of the most euphoric and uplifting tracks on the record is 'Skipping Like a Stone', which features Beck, who the pair both admire.

Simons recalls that working with him was "a real pleasure – to be able to send him a song we're working on, and together, we can figure out where it goes."

The original demo had been floating around for some time but, as Rowlands says, "It didn't feel complete until we heard him sing on it. There was always a good idea, but he took it somewhere beyond," he explains, adding that this is "the brilliance of collaboration". "You imagine it to a certain point, and then someone else of his talent and incredible voice and vision says: 'It can go here as well.'"

The pair's decision to work with French vocalist Halo Maud was the result of a similar situation. "There were lots of songs that had very rough vocal ideas, but we were trying to find a voice that could sing them and really get to the heart of what we were chasing," Rowlands reflects.

Having heard her record, they were impressed by her voice and decided that she would be a good fit. The first song the pair sent her was 'Live Again', so that she could re-sing the demo. Having sent the tracks back and forward over email, Rowlands describes the collaboration as "a really easy, beautiful process". "We had a very clear idea of what we wanted to do, and she totally got it. Immediately, we felt hers was the voice that we wanted to communicate these things. Hearing her interpretation, it just felt like, 'Oh, this is the record now.'"

Because Rowlands and Simons wanted the album to have a circular feel to it, Maud's voice is present on both the introduction and the closing title track. The pair say that it was important to have her start it and then loop it back around to the beginning as a way of bringing it to a close. "That was an idea that we hit upon when we were putting the album together – that it would be this sort of circular thing. At the point of starting, the voices would be broken and wrong. And the journey loops back around to piece it together, in a way, so it was brilliant to have her voice flowing through the whole album," says Rowlands.

He adds that their process of making albums is "often quite long". He and Simons work on a record "until we get to a point where we listen to it all and feel moved by it and feel that it communicates something and expresses something that is within us," he says.

**"I LOVE IT WHEN WE PLAY LIVE BECAUSE WE MIX TOGETHER THINGS WE MADE 30 YEARS AGO WITH SOMETHING WE'VE JUST MADE. I LOVE THE COHESION BETWEEN IT ALL"**

***ROWLANDS***

**SPARKS FLY** Ed Simons (above left) and Tom Rowlands love the new perspective other artists can bring

Simons suggests that there is an "unknowable knowing" about when a record is complete. "Knowing when an album is an album and not just a collection of tracks or a recording of a passage of time... It's when you put things together and there's a flow," he suggests.

Rowlands sums it up: "It's a feeling," he says. But, as has always been the case, rather than wanting to elicit a specific emotion, Rowlands and Simons are happy as long as people feel something when listening to the new album. "We cannot control meaning," Rowlands says, "but often after finishing an album, you think, 'Everything that was in us is now out of us.'"

Although they didn't consciously aim to link the new album to their past discography, a progression is evident. "We never forget them," Rowlands says of their earlier albums. "Hopefully, listening to the first one, you can understand how we ended up with the 10th one." He expands: "We never think: 'Ground zero: we've done this and disown The Chemical Brothers sound' or what we like about music. But hopefully there's a common thread of two souls creating something together that's kind of consistent. And within that, there's a lot of broad musical expressions. But there's something at the heart of it that ties them all together."

Similarly, when it comes to their spectacular live shows, songs from different eras are paired effortlessly. "I love it when we play live because we mix together things we literally made 30 years ago with something we've just made. I love the way there's a cohesion between it all, and everything joins together," says Rowlands. "Considering there isn't a lead vocalist or lead guitarist that gives a band its very identifiable signature, we've somehow managed to make this music that still feels really connected. I think, with our take on music, we've made our own little kind of world." ®

THE RECORD LABEL AWARD

# PARTISAN RECORDS

**This label focuses on allowing its stable of artists the time and space they need to create their best work. Their first-ever Mercury Prize win this year proves that this approach pays off**

BY **Will Richards**

IN AN ERA of playlisting and instant gratification, record labels with long-term thinking and artist development at their heart have never been more vital. This idea is at the very core of Partisan Records, and that's why it is this year's recipient of The Record Label Award at the Rolling Stone UK Awards, in collaboration with Rémy Martin.

Started in 2007 in New York City, Partisan Records has since expanded to London, Los Angeles and Berlin. "We describe the label as having a global vision but local execution," vice president Jeff Bell tells Rolling Stone UK. "It's about building audiences worldwide for artists and being able to push them to think about that and what that means to have success at this point in history."

In their 15 years in the business, Partisan have released albums by Cigarettes After Sex, John Grant and more. In the late 2010s, they were at the vanguard of the UK and Irish post-punk explosion, developing both IDLES and Fontaines D.C. into two of the most exciting and relevant bands of the day. Of their relationship with Partisan, Fontaines D.C. said: "Partisan is a label that is solely about facilitating the creation of credible and powerful music with a roster of artists that we're honoured to call our labelmates. They changed our lives forever, and we're lucky to have that trust."

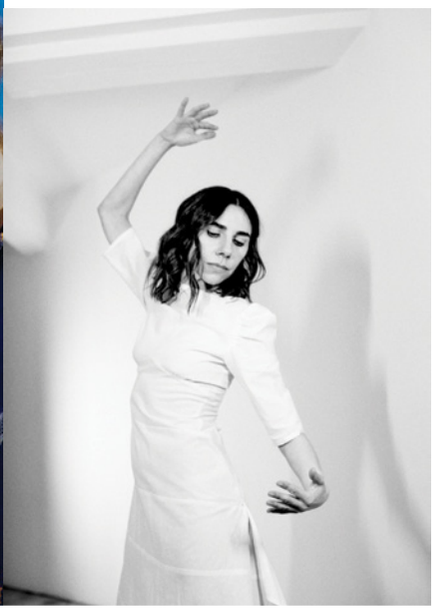
And 2023 has been Partisan's biggest year yet. In July, they began working with PJ Harvey for the release of her new album, *I Inside the Old Year Dying*. The record saw her move from major label Island to an indie, and Bell says she was looking to work with "a smaller, more dedicated team". He says: "We took the time to understand her music, and that was very important to her. Her team had observed that through some of the other releases we had done, and we're very thankful that she trusted us to move forward with this release for her."

This year, Partisan also released *Chaos for the Fly*, the debut solo album from Fontaines D.C. frontman Grian Chatten. "I would say he's one of the most gifted songwriters of his generation," Bell says of Chatten. "Seeing his audience, both with and without the Fontaines D.C. connection, be so receptive to that record so quickly has been very rewarding for everyone involved." It also highlights another facet of Partisan's appeal, in giving band members on its roster the chance to explore side projects and solo ventures under its umbrella.

Another solo debut on Partisan this year comes from Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter Blondshell, whose self-titled debut came out in April. She tells Rolling Stone UK: "When I met everyone at Partisan and talked to them about my music, they were all so genuine. They talked to me about what my songs meant to them and why they connected with my album. Their approach is so based on the music and the story behind the songs. It may sound like a simple thing, but I know that that kind of genuine care about art and artists can be quite hard to find."

Perhaps the biggest moment of their year though was picking up their first-ever Mercury Prize win for Ezra Collective's 2022 album, *Where I'm Meant to Be*. "That band is an important band for a few reasons," Bell says. "Anyone that's seen them live will know what I'm talking about, but it's also great to see an institution like the Mercury Prize validate what they're doing, the work that they've done, and the

EZRA COLLECTIVE; ALIYAH OTCHERE; PJ HARVEY: STEVE GULLICK; IDLES: TOM HAM



**WINNING TEAM** (From top) Ezra Collective; PJ Harvey; IDLES

work that they are going to be doing. It's important that [the award] went to a group that it's actually making a tangible difference for as well. We've really, really seen that already, and they're well into making new music and are very well positioned to run with that momentum and have an even bigger year next year."

Growth, development and patience are key tenets of Partisan's identity, and it's shown in their new signings, HONESTY. The Leeds collective features George Mitchell, a member of defunct post-punk band Eagulls, who the label released two albums with in the mid-2010s. "It's a really nice full-circle moment," Bell reflects, "because the music that Eagulls were making at that time was laying that groundwork that has got us to the likes of IDLES and Fontaines D.C.. George and other members of the band have been working on their own projects this whole time, and we've been there supporting as needed, not rushing it and seeing it come to fruition the better part of a decade later. I think that that speaks to the approach that we seem to have."

Also central to Partisan's approach is understanding that every artist has their own unique set of circumstances. "Every artist needs something different," Bell says. "Sometimes the vision is completely there, and the best thing we can do is just stay out of the way and provide a platform to support that vision while still pushing them."

Bell adds: "We're there to push each other. To get to the bottom of what each artist needs is one of the great joys of the job. It's about taking the time to invest in the people behind the art."

Another key part of Partisan's work is releasing back catalogues of legends from across genres, be it a 10th-anniversary reissue of DJ Rashad's influential debut album *Double Cup* or bringing out unreleased music by Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti. With a new album from IDLES due in February 2024 and new projects ranging from NYC-based electronic punks Lip Critic to Philadelphia multi-instrumentalist Body Meat, it's a label with a diverse group of artists but tied together by the same ethos. "It's about giving artists space," Bell says. "When you do that right, what you're left with is a community – a community of fans, a community of artists, and a community of people that genuinely care. If you focus on those things, the rest tends to take care of itself, even if it takes a decade or two.

"The idea of success for Partisan was never about people knowing who the label was," Bell reflects. "It was about people getting excited when they found out who was on the roster. That's the ultimate goal."

THE TELEVISION AWARD

# DOCTOR WHO

**We celebrate *Doctor Who*'s diamond jubilee by selecting the standout episodes from six decades of time travel**

BY **Richard Unwin**

FROM THE TARDIS to the arrival of the Cybermen, via the multiple incarnations of its Doctor – including its first female and first Black and queer person – *Doctor Who* has been as intrinsic to British identity as tea and biscuits and Paddington Bear. As the BBC prepares to celebrate *Doctor Who*'s diamond jubilee, it is the rightful recipient of The Television Award at the first in-person Rolling Stone UK Awards, in collaboration with Rémy Martin. Here, we mark six decades of time travel by selecting some standout episodes from the legendary series.

## 1960s

**'An Unearthly Child'** 1963
In the very first episode, broadcast the day after the assassination of JFK, viewers see two concerned London schoolteachers follow a mysterious pupil to her home – which turns out to be an old police box standing in a junkyard. When they push past the girl's unhelpful, cantankerous grandfather and into the box, they find themselves in a strange gleaming control room that is somehow bigger on the inside!

**'The Dalek Invasion of Earth'** 1964
The Daleks had proved an instant hit when they first appeared in only the second *Doctor Who* serial and were quickly booked for a return appearance. Only this time they were terrorising our own planet with a full-scale invasion. Location footage in the second episode of this story shows the metal monsters gliding around Trafalgar Square and over Westminster Bridge, having truly become the masters of Earth.

**'The Tenth Planet'** 1966
Not only did this story feature the first appearance of iconic villains the Cybermen, but it also found a very novel way to deal with the fact that the lead actor (William Hartnell) was unable to continue in the role of the Doctor, due to ill health. At the end of the adventure, the character collapses onto the floor of the TARDIS and, before our very eyes, his features morph into those of character actor Patrick Troughton. The first ever 'regeneration' had taken place. (But was yet to be referred to as such.)

**'The Highlanders'** 1967
The final scene of this Highland fling originally sees the TARDIS crew bidding a fond farewell to Scottish guest character Jamie McCrimmon, played by Frazer Hines. However, the young actor's performance so impressed the producers that the scene was specially re-shot to show McCrimmon joining the TARDIS travellers on board the time-ship, where he would go on to become the longest-running *Doctor Who* companion of all time.

**'The Web of Fear'** 1968
This story was the prime reason that many children steadfastly refused to travel on the Tube in the late 1960s, featuring as it does one of the most memorable sequences of the Patrick Troughton era. Great hairy robotic Yeti – controlled by the Great Intelligence – swarm through the tunnels of the London Underground, spraying deadly web guns and massacring the soldiers of the newly formed United Nations Intelligence Task Force. Apparently, the Tube station sets were so convincing that London Transport made a complaint about unlicensed filming on their premises.

## 1970s

**'Spearhead from Space'** 1970
A new decade and a new format. Now in colour, the show sees the Third Doctor – played by comic actor Jon Pertwee – permanently based on Earth and attached to paramilitary group UNIT as their scientific advisor, serving under Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart (Nicholas Courtney). The climax of this first adventure of the new era features shop-window dummies coming to life and shooting down the innocent pedestrians of Ealing Broadway.

**'Terror of the Autons'** 1971
The debut serial of the 1971 season sees the introduction of a new character created by producer Barry Letts and script editor Terrance Dicks – an evil Time Lord designed to be something of a 'Moriarty' figure for the Doctor. 'The Master' (Roger Delgado), as this meddling jackanapes introduces himself, would go on to be revealed as the 'surprise' villain in every single story of that year.

**'The Three Doctors'** 1973
The tenth anniversary celebrations kicked off a little early with this celebratory story actually beginning transmission at the end of December '72. The first three Doctors join forces to defeat Omega, an ancient villain trapped within a black hole. Sadly, William Hartnell was prevented by his deteriorating health from participating fully but does appear on a monitor screen opposite his successors Troughton and Pertwee. The Time Lords reward the Doctor by ending his exile and restoring his control of the TARDIS.

**DOCTOR'S ORDERS**
(From top) The First Doctor (William Hartnell) confronts a Dalek in 1965 serial *Galaxy 4;* the Daleks create trouble for the Third Doctor Jon Pertwee; Pertwee with Second Doctor Patrick Troughton

**'Planet of the Spiders'** 1974
Now travelling with journalist Sarah Jane Smith (Elizabeth Sladen), the Third Doctor visits the famous blue planet Metebelis Three, where he is forced to face his fears. This Buddhist-inspired tale ends with Jon Pertwee falling out of the TARDIS and regenerating into Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor. "Well," says the Brigadier, "here we go again..."

BBC PICTURES

### ‘The Invisible Enemy’ 1978

The title here is in reference to a deadly space virus, but the story is more well remembered for introducing a true *Doctor Who* icon – robot dog K9. Originally created by one Professor Marius of a galactic medical outpost to replace a flesh-and-blood mutt that he had to leave behind on Earth, the canine computer made the TARDIS his new permanent kennel at the end of this story. Much to the irritation of star Tom Baker.

## 1980s

### ‘Shada’ 1980

With extensive location filming in Cambridge and a script by the legendary Douglas Adams, ‘Shada’ was all set to become a classic... until strike action at the BBC led to the studio sessions being cancelled and the story abandoned in a half-finished state. The adventure has now been released in possibly more formats than any other, with Tom Baker recording linking narration for a 90s VHS of the completed material, a Paul McGann-starring audio version, novelisations and animations. Pretty good for a ‘lost’ story.

### ‘Logopolis’ 1981

After a record-breaking seven years of playing the Doctor, Tom Baker’s departure from the role was announced as a major story on national news. The Fourth Doctor’s demise was to come after a tussle with the Master (now played by Anthony Ainley) on top of a radio telescope. Following a fatal fall, the Doctor merges with a mysterious figure known only as ‘the Watcher’ – who turns out to be a version of his future self – and regenerates into a very youthful Peter Davison.

### ‘Earthshock’ 1982

Peter Davison’s Fifth Doctor was by this point travelling with a trio of young assistants, so when producer John Nathan-Turner decided to ‘thin the herd’ a little, the unthinkable happened. Young boy-genius Adric – played by Matthew Waterhouse – is killed while crash-landing a spaceship onto prehistoric Earth and wiping out the dinosaurs. A generation was traumatised as silent credits played over an image of Adric’s badge for mathematical excellence, now shattered into pieces.

**TIME AND SPACE**
(From the top) Peter Davison is David Tennant’s favourite Doctor *and* also happens to be his father-in-law; Tom Baker remains the longest-serving Doctor; Colin Baker (no relation to Tom) is the only Doctor who has not truly regenerated; (opposite) Paul McGann and Daphne Ashbrook in the 1996 TV film, *Doctor Who: The Movie*

### ‘The Caves of Androzani’ 1984

Regularly topping fan polls as the greatest *Doctor Who* story of all time, this gritty tale of corrupt politicians and grimy gun-runners was a spectacular finale for Peter Davison’s Fifth Doctor. Poisoned by some alien flora, he gives up the last of the precious antidote to save his companion Peri (Nicola Bryant). Thus his life flashes before his eyes – and he turns into Colin Baker. “You were expecting someone else?” the Sixth Doctor asks a bemused Peri.

### ‘Vengeance on Varos’ 1985

A corrupt and rotten government tortures and films its political prisoners and broadcasts the video nasties as a form of entertainment for the goggle-eyed masses. Pre-dating the concept of reality television, this at-times-disturbing serial was ahead of the curve. Complaints about the levels of violence from the likes of BBC1 Controller Michael Grade seemed to rather miss the point – that the story itself was a critique of the bloodthirsty state of TV.

### ‘The Trial of a Time Lord’ 1986

After an 18-month hiatus imposed by Mr Grade, the show returned with a truncated series that makes a deliberate effort to tone down the violence. The 23rd season consists of a single 14-episode serial – albeit one broken up into four distinct

BBC PICTURES

stories. The Time Lords have once again put the Doctor on trial, mirroring the real-life situation – which the fans perceive as the future of *Doctor Who* itself hanging in the balance. There were campaigns. And a charity single.

**'Survival'** 1989
The ironically named 'Survival' was the last episode of the original 26-year run of *Doctor Who* to be transmitted. The makers of the show suspected that this might be the case, and so a hastily scripted final scene was added, depicting the Seventh Doctor and his companion Ace (Sophie Aldred) walking off into the distance, while a voiceover from Sylvester McCoy lets us know that their adventures would continue: "Somewhere there's danger, somewhere there's injustice, and somewhere else the tea's getting cold. Come on, Ace, we've got work to do!"

## 1990s

**'Search Out Space'** 1990
Although no new series appeared in 1990, viewers did get to see what the Doctor and Ace got up to next. A special episode of a BBC educational programme had the characters competing in 'The Ultimate Challenge', the biggest gameshow in the universe. This was mainly an excuse to explain various aspects of astronomy and geometry, but by this point fans were happy to devour whatever scraps they could get.

**'Dimensions in Time'** 1993
For a short while it seemed as if the 30th anniversary would be celebrated with a special feature-length drama called *The Dark Dimension*. But then that was cancelled, and we ended up with a pair of mini episodes that crossed over *Doctor Who* with *EastEnders* and were broadcast as part of *Children in Need*. They're magnificent in their own way, however, and all the living Doctors took part. Where else can you see Pat Butcher sharing screen-time with a Cyberman?

**Downtime** 1995
With *Doctor Who* having been off the air for six years, fans were becoming so desperate for new material that some of them began making it themselves. A few dozen semi-professional fan-films were produced over this period, and *Downtime* – by Reeltime Pictures – is one of the slickest of the lot. Producer Keith Barnfather persuaded several stars to return to their TV roles, including Elisabeth Sladen as Sarah Jane Smith and Nicholas Courtney as the Brigadier.

**Doctor Who: The Movie** 1996
The second coming! Seemingly from nowhere, it was announced that *Doctor Who* would be returning to BBC1 in a US TV co-production, with Paul McGann as the Eighth Doctor. Sadly, this turned out to be a one-night stand, with just one 90-minute special being produced, but for one glorious night the show was back. Fans were outraged by the Doctor being revealed to be half-human, and – even more shockingly – by him kissing a woman.

**The Scarlet Empress** 1998
For various reasons, the Paul McGann-led production

had not been made into a series, and in the minds of many, the TV show was now dead. In the literary world, however, the Doctor Who brand was thriving, with the BBC having taken the licence back in-house. They published two novels per month: one featuring the ongoing adventures of the Eighth Doctor, and one focusing on a past Doctor. *The Scarlet Empress* by Paul Magrs is an excellent example of the former. Full of outlandish imagery and magical realism, it reinvented Doctor Who for a bit.

**10/10** (Above) A *Doctor Who* fan from an early age, David Tennant won a bit part in a *Doctor Who*-themed audiodrama and then graduated to become star of the show. He is widely considered the most popular Doctor; (below) the newly rebooted *Doctor Who* returned with Christopher Eccleston as the Ninth Time Lord

### ‘Curse of the Fatal Death’ 1999

When future show-runner Steven Moffat was tasked with writing a comedy drama for Comic Relief night, he chose to produce a *Doctor Who* script. This saw the ‘Ninth’ Doctor – played by Rowan Atkinson – burning through his remaining regenerations. The various incarnations were played by Richard E. Grant, Jim Broadbent and Hugh Grant, before finally a female version (gasp) was portrayed by Joanna Lumley.

## 2000s

### ‘Storm Warning’ 2001

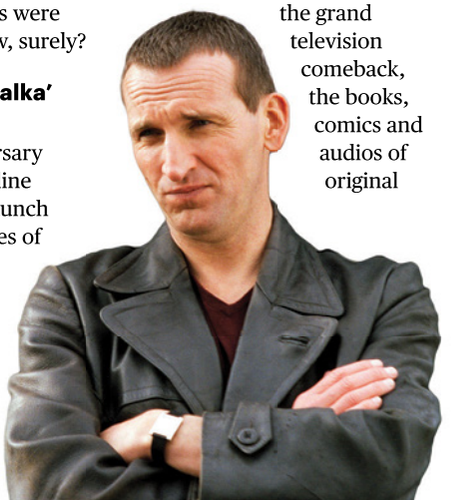
There were jubilations when Paul McGann agreed to record audio adventures for Big Finish Productions as the Eighth Doctor. Starting with ‘Storm Warning’, a derring-do tale of airship disaster, we suddenly had ongoing episodes performed by the incumbent Doctor again. This was as good as things were ever going to get now, surely?

### ‘Scream of the Shalka’ 2003

For the 40th anniversary in 2003, the BBC online team decided to relaunch *Doctor Who* as a series of animated webcasts starring Richard E. Grant as the Ninth Doctor, with ‘Scream of the Shalka’ the first thrilling instalment. Unfortunately, it seems that no one told the people developing this idea that behind the scenes, other plans were being made... And on 26th September fans got the best present ever, as it was announced that *Doctor Who* would return to BBC1 with a new live-action series in 2005. ‘Scream of the Shalka’ was largely ignored and further webcasts were canned.

### Medicinal Purposes 2004

In this, the last of the ‘wilderness years’ before the grand television comeback, the books, comics and audios of original adventures continued to be produced in vast quantities – their publishers were perhaps nervous that their days in the spotlight were numbered. The audio drama *Medicinal Purposes*, which dealt with infamous body-snatchers Burke and Hair, is now notable for one of its cast members. Appearing as relatively small guest character ‘Daft Jamie’, there was a young actor and hardcore *Doctor Who* fan by the name of David Tennant...



### ‘The Parting of the Ways’ 2005

*Doctor Who* made a triumphant return and became an instant hit with a whole new generation overnight. Christopher Eccleston was the Ninth Doctor and pop star Billie Piper proved her acting chops as companion Rose. Eccleston would only feature in this single series – due to some backstage bother that was never fully disclosed – and in the final episode he kisses Rose to absorb the time vortex from her... and then regenerates into David Tennant.

### ‘Doomsday’ 2006

Amazingly, the Daleks and the Cybermen had never met each other on screen, but they finally do in this episode scripted by Russell T Davies. The two big baddies come faceplate to eyestalk during the Battle of Canary Wharf, at the top of the iconic tower. “Daleks, be warned. You have declared war upon the Cybermen,” growls the Cyberleader. “This is not war,” declares a bitchy Black Dalek, “This is pest control.”

### ‘Voyage of the Damned’ 2007

*Doctor Who* has often been accused of veering towards camp, and is sometimes is guilty as charged. But perhaps never more so than when a guest-starring Kylie Minogue sacrifices herself to save a space-faring version of the *Titanic* on Christmas Day.

BBC PICTURES

The tradition of a special episode being broadcast at Christmas very quickly became a permanent fixture that was as keenly anticipated as the Queen's Speech. (the late Queen Elizabeth II is in this as well, by the way, voiced by Spitting Image veteran Jessica Martin.)

## 2010s

### 'Vincent and the Doctor' 2010

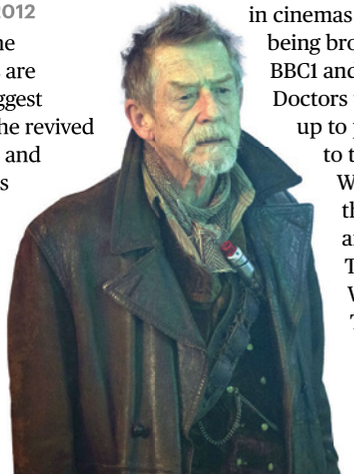
After regenerating into Matt Smith on New Year's Day, one of the Eleventh Doctor's most memorable adventures this year was a trip back to 1890 to meet Vincent van Gogh. Written by romcom supremo Richard Curtis, the adventure deals with themes of depression and mental health as the Doctor and Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) help the troubled artist to defeat an invisible monster.

### 'The Doctor's Wife' 2011

A delicate and beautiful script from fantasy giant Neil Gaiman had the Doctor's only constant companion – the TARDIS – transformed into human form, meaning that he could finally converse with what the title playfully refers to as his 'wife'. A spellbinding performance from Suranne Jones as the personification of the space-time machine really has us believing that she is infinitely complex and most definitely 'bigger on the inside'.

### 'The Angels Take Manhattan' 2012

Living statues the Weeping Angels are probably the biggest monster hit of the revived era of the show, and this episode sees the ultimate expression of that as the Statue of Liberty is transformed into a giant ravenous monster. The story ends with the 'lonely assassins' sending companion Amy Pond and her husband Rory (Arthur Darvill) back into the past where – for complicated script reasons – the Doctor can never visit them again.



### 'The Day of the Doctor' 2013

The 50th anniversary was a big deal, and the centrepiece of the celebrations was a special feature-length episode filmed in 3D. 'The Day of the Doctor' was screened in cinemas as well as being broadcast on BBC1 and saw three Doctors teaming up to put an end to the Time War between the Daleks and the Time Lords. While David Tennant was more than happy to return, Christopher Eccleston unsurprisingly declined, and so a new 'hidden' incarnation was created – the War Doctor, played by John Hurt.

### 'Heaven Sent' 2015

While he was showrunner, writer Steven Moffat liked to set himself challenges, and this episode is one of his absolute masterpieces. It's a one-man show, with Peter Capaldi performing the entire piece alone. There's a shuffling, hooded creature that pursues him, and some fleeting memories of companion Clara (Jenna Coleman), but otherwise he carries the entire story singlehandedly. Magnificent.

### 'Rosa' 2018

Jodie Whittaker smashes through the TARDIS glass ceiling and becomes the first full-time female incarnation of the Doctor – much to the fury of some of the fandom. One of her earliest adventures involves travelling back to Alabama in 1955 and meeting civil rights hero Rosa Parks in a sensitive script co-written by new showrunner Chris Chibnall and popular children's author Malorie Blackman.

**WHO ARE YOU**
(From the top) The Twelfth Doctor Peter Capaldi; Eleventh Doctor Matt Smith is the only Doctor to have been nominated for a BAFTA for playing the role; Jodie Whittaker (centre) broke new ground as the first female Doctor; John Hurt as the War Doctor in 'The Day of the Doctor'

## 2020s

### 'The Timeless Children' 2020

This season finale takes the dramatic step of revealing that the First Doctor hadn't been the first Doctor after all, and that there were in fact goodness knows how many of them. It turns out that the Doctor wasn't even from the planet of the Time Lords and had been found as a child, abandoned by a portal to another dimension. The mystery of *Doctor Who*'s title is restored!

### 'Flux' 2021

Due to the limitations of filming during a pandemic, this series was scaled down to only six episodes, all of which made up one big storyline. But making the most of the hand that they'd been dealt, cast and crew pulled together to make an enormous and gripping adventure that threatens the destruction of the entire universe. One of the best seasons of the modern series.

### 'The Power of the Doctor' 2022

Not only was this the grand finale for Jodie Whittaker's magnificent Thirteenth Doctor, but it also served as a celebratory party for the 100th anniversary of the BBC itself. Author Chris Chibnall threw everything into the mix – Daleks, Cybermen, the Master, old Doctors and old companions. It was a spectacular end to the era and ended with Jodie regenerating into... David Tennant. Just in time for this year's 60th-anniversary specials. ®

*The full list: '60 iconic moments from 60 years of* Doctor Who' *can be found at rollingstone.co.uk*

THE FESTIVAL AWARD

# DOWNLOAD

**For putting its loyal fans at the forefront of its annual live — and growing — celebration of heavy metal music as well as adjacent genres, this 20-year-old festival is head and shoulders above the rest**

BY **Sophie Porter**

‘ONE THING ABOUT the rock world, they [the fans] can smell bullshit a mile away,” says Download boss Andy Copping, months after the festival’s 20-year celebration.

“I think we’re very lucky in the rock world. The acts and their fans stay relevant. The fans are incredibly loyal. Once they’re with you, they’re lifers.” It’s a mentality that Copping and his team have always sought to embrace: “We want the fans to come with us and grow with us,” he says.

Since Download launched in 2003, it has fostered a diehard community of heavy music lovers who view Donington Park as an essential pilgrimage site for like-minded fans across the globe. This year, Download basked in the glory of *two* headline sets from Metallica and a real festival moment when Bring Me the Horizon headlined for the first time.

It’s for these reasons that Download, the UK’s spiritual home of all things heavy music, is the winner of The Festival Award.

“Everybody knows what Rolling Stone is and what it stands for and the fact that, in the first year in the UK, that we won this award, I can’t find the words properly for how much it means. It is validation, quite frankly,” says Copping.

Asked about his favourite moments from the past 20 years, Copping lists booking AC/DC in 2010 when they weren’t doing festivals, Lars Ulrich of Metallica’s impassioned speech this year on the importance of Download, Monsters of Rock and Donington to his life and band, and seeing the somewhat controversial headline booking of Muse in 2015 go on to win them new fans. But in keeping with his character and the ethos of the festival, Copping’s attention turns again to the community: “The fans make the festival. We are nothing without those fans that come in year in, year out and support us. And I’ve seen them come in with the smiles on their faces. There’s nothing better than that.” If it’s validation that they’re after, this is all the Download team need to know that they’re on the right track for the coming decades.

As for that aforementioned community, it’s fair to say that heavy music has long gone hand in hand with those who find themselves on the fringes of society and, for a lot of us who grew up in the early years of the internet and music television when Download was launched, online forums, MySpace bulletins and the like were a reliable place in which to find solace and likeminded people. It therefore makes sense that since its inception, Download has always prioritised the voices and

ABBIE SHIPPERLEY

experiences of the community it serves, utilising fan forums and direct contact to give its audience a certain amount of ownership over the festival.

“When we first started out, we were without a doubt the first festival in the world that really embraced its audience in the sense of properly creating a community,” says Copping. “It was really important to us that the Download community really feel that we’ve got this kind of family ethos and that they did have a voice.”

It’s a blueprint that has allowed the festival to grow year on year while remaining firmly in tune with its roots, and it’s one that has been co-opted by the wider festival landscape. “Other festivals in the world were going, ‘You are absolutely mad to open the doors to your audience,” says Copping. “Interestingly, virtually every other festival in the world now is going

**LIGHT MY FIRE** Bring Me the Horizon headlining

**BOW-WOW** Copping with mascot Download Dog

direct to the fans." In the age of social media, when everyone has a voice and an opinion, it is increasingly important that festival organisers "take that on board", Copping believes.

Download's relationship with its fans has also allowed it to move with the times and broaden its offering by including acts from heavy-adjacent genres, such as emo titans My Chemical Romance and electro pop-rock two-piece Twenty One Pilots on the stage at Donington Park. Having risen from the riff-laden ashes of *Monsters of Rock* (1980-1996) and Ozzy Osbourne's *Ozzfest* (2002) on the very same site, Download was always going to have the job of balancing its own rock lineage and access to heritage acts with its aim to platform newer talent from a broader sonic spectrum. How do the team do it?

"We literally book by committee," Copping tells me. It's another area where Download bucks the trend of most flagship festivals. "The only way this festival is going to move is by having fresh eyes and ears, not only towards the community, but also having people that are working with me on a day-to-day basis on 'This band is going to break through,' 'This band is hot.'"

Having surpassed its early goal of hosting more editions of Download than there were Monsters of Rock, Copping sees no reason to not be thinking about the next 10 or 20 years. "There's plenty [of bands] out there for us to continue the growth, and there's bands that haven't even formed yet but in ten years' time could be headliners."

We talk a little about who those acts might be in the short term and which heritage bands they might be interspersed with. Names like Blink 182, Fall Out Boy, My Chemical Romance – each of which has 15-20 years or more under their belts – come up. Would Copping consider these heritage acts?

"On paper, yes, you would. But they still have a certain freshness about them. Would you class Limp Bizkit as a heritage act? I guess not really in the way that you would say that about AC/DC." He also throws the likes of Paramore into the mix, as well as heavy metal heroes Iron Maiden and punk mainstays Green Day, but what feels more exciting about Download's future is just how palpable Copping's passion is for nurturing talent. "Something that we've always wanted to do is not only give bands a platform, but also give them an opportunity to grow with the festival and not just for Download."

Slipknot and Bring Me the Horizon are prime examples of two acts who started at the bottom of the bill. After being given their first headline slot at Download, Slipknot now headlines international festivals. Among the new generation of bands that Copping hopes to see follow the same path are the likes of Sleep Token, Ghost and Architects.

For Download, then, the future looks incredibly bright, with a new legion of heavy acts ready to put their stamp on Donington Park. To borrow a quote from KISS: "*I wanna rock and roll all night*" – and for many more years to come. ®

# showing up the funny

**Munya Chawawa has made a name for himself as a razor-sharp comedian who can satirise the news like no one else. Here, our Awards host talks to Rolling Stone UK about growing up Black in a Norfolk village, his struggles with clichés around masculinity, and why he made the move into stand-up**

**BY NICK REILLY**
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK CANT**
**CREATIVE DIRECTION AND STYLING BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN**

# munya chawawa

"I REMEMBER BEING ON holiday last year. It was churro Tuesday, and there was going to be unlimited churros on the breakfast buffet," Munya Chawawa recalls over lunch in an east London bistro.

"I woke up and I could smell the churros wafting down the corridor, and I'd planned to binge on a load of them and just wallow in the sun for the whole day. But then I looked at my phone and saw I'd been sent a video. I opened it up and saw Will Smith slapping Chris Rock onstage at the Oscars. From that point on, I just knew that my final day of holiday was going to be spent making a parody video for Instagram over the terrible Wi-Fi connection of a hotel in Fuerteventura."

In recent years, situations like these have increasingly become the norm for Chawawa. Whenever a major news event occurs, the 30-year-old British-Zimbabwean satirist, stand-up comedian and actor seemingly drops everything and jumps into action at lightning speed.

To put it another way: if Batman has the Bat-Signal to let him know whenever Gotham City is in distress, Chawawa has the resounding cry of "WAKE UP, MUNYA!" flooding his Instagram inbox whenever his 1.2 million followers want to let him know that he's needed to provide yet another unique spin on the tumultuous times we're living through.

It's testament to Chawawa's very 21st-century brand of comedy that he has a city's worth of people who follow his every move on social media and who rely on him to skewer global events. His ability to turn around videos within hours of events breaking is seriously impressive – only matched by his instinctive skill at capturing the zeitgeist.

Chawawa had originally envisaged becoming a TV presenter, but admits he almost fell into comedy in 2018 when he became so incensed by Jamie Oliver's recipe for jerk rice – which was widely called out for cultural appropriation – that he felt obliged to make an Instagram skit about it.

"It felt like my lightbulb moment. I had this surge of electricity where everything in my life was saying, 'Bro, this is it. It's your sweet spot. This is our pocket. Learn as quick as you can, evolve, dedicate yourself to the craft, and it's going to take you somewhere.' So that's what I did," he says.

Since then, he's had huge success with his videos. One of the most popular, which boasts more than three million views, was recorded in June 2021, and saw him deliver a ruthless parody of Shaggy's 'It Wasn't Me' to take the piss out of the then Health Secretary Matt Hancock when he was caught having an affair in Downing Street. "*The Sun newspaper caught me red-handed / Creeping with the Tory next door*," he sang, just hours after the story broke.

More recently, it's the UK government's ban of the XL Bully dog breed that has caught his attention. In one clip, Chawawa assumes the guise of a blinkered Bully owner called Steve who blindly calls out "dog racism" against the breed. It's a funny moment, but the clip then becomes something entirely unexpected, as Chawawa draws incredibly clever parallels between this and hostile attitudes towards the migrant crisis.

It's for all these reasons that Chawawa – a comedian who has genuinely interesting things to say about the world we're living in – is the perfect host for the Rolling Stone UK Awards, in collaboration with Rémy Martin.

**PREVIOUS SPREAD**

MUNYA WEARS COAT AND HOODIE BY **LANVIN,** EARRINGS (THROUGHOUT) MUNYA'S OWN

**THIS PAGE**

MUNYA WEARS LEATHER JACKET BY **AT.KOLLEKTIVE**, KNITWEAR BY **JACQUEMUS AT MATCHES**, TROUSERS BY **BOSS**, BOOTS BY **CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN,** RINGS (ON LEFT) BY **THOMAS SABO**, RING (ON RIGHT) BY **PAWNSHOP LONDON**

**OPPOSITE**

MUNYA WEARS TRACKSUIT TOP, SWEATPANTS AND JACKET BY **ONITSUKA TIGER**, BOOTS BY **UGG**, RINGS BY **BLEUE BURNHAM**

"You're going to see a slick and professional Munya. I know what awards shows are like, the drinks will be flowing. If it gets lairy, I'm here to bring a bit of law and order, with the occasional dad joke," he laughs.

On set, he's a warm and amiable presence, explaining to everyone in the room how, for the past year, a Rolling Stone UK cover has sat at the top of the vision board that hangs in his bedroom.

It's where he displays images that reflect what he wants to achieve over the coming 12 months. It's worked too, although perhaps not always in the manner that he was expecting. An image of Dwayne Johnson – which represented his desire to land an on-screen role with The Rock himself – resulted in a brief cameo in the 2022 animated hit, *DC League of Super-Pets*. The Rock provided the central role of Superdog – Clark Kent's very own Labrador – while Munya delivered a brief cameo for UK audiences as, er, a Welsh corgi.

I tell him that my three-year-old niece, in her first-ever cinema trip, loved the film. "That's all down to the voice acting of the corgi," he jokes.

## "FOR ME, THE SHOCK CAME FROM BEING THE ONLY BLACK PERSON IN YOUR SCHOOL, OR IN YOUR VILLAGE"

"If she hasn't left a review, please tell her to do so. Me and The Rock need all the help we can get."

As for Rolling Stone UK's place on that board, it's our striking cover image of YouTuber and boxer KSI baring his six-pack that Chawawa has been staring at for the past year.

"I'd look at it every morning when I was lathering up, because when you've got dry skin, you have to lather up in Vaseline after every shower," he reflects. "So, it is quite strange saying it out loud, I was staring into *that* Rolling Stone UK cover every morning! But you know what, the universe works in mysterious ways, and we're having this interview now, so there's no questions asked."

CHAWAWA WAS BORN in Derby in 1992 and fondly recalls how some of his earliest comic experiences were formed when he'd spend hours watching on in awe as

“IT FELT LIKE MY LIGHTBULB MOMENT. EVERYTHING WAS SAYING, ‘BRO, THIS IS IT’”

**THIS PAGE**

MUNYA WEARS SHIRT BY **CASABLANCA AT MATCHES**, NECKLACE BY **HATTON LABS**, CROCODILE RING BY **THOMAS SABO**

**OPPOSITE**

MUNYA WEARS SHIRT BY **CASABLANCA AT MATCHES**, WATCH BY **MONTBLANC**, RING BY **BLEUE BURNHAM**

his grandad engaged in a groan-worthy, dad-joke-packed battle of wits with his uncle.

"My grandad was just a natural comedian, and I can remember wanting to tussle with that side of him," he says. "My uncle would come around, and they'd trade dad jokes, and I just wanted to get involved, to have a piece of that rapport and watch these two people who were just effortlessly controlling the energy of a room."

Thirty years later, Chawawa has managed to achieve just that with his first-ever UK stand-up tour, which has taken in three sold-out shows at London's Kentish Town Forum this autumn and concludes just weeks after our interview. But more on that later.

After spending his early years in Derby, Chawawa's father moved the family to Zimbabwe when he was a child, with the comedian previously describing the African country as one of "the greatest places on Earth". His love for the place he calls "Zim" is clear on the final night of three shows in London too, as he arrives on stage in a custom-designed Levi's outfit embroidered with some of the country's most recognisable emblems, including the Jacaranda trees that line the streets of Harare, and the rocks of Domboshava.

But when Chawawa was 11, his family moved back to the UK as a result of political and financial turmoil in the country under the regime of Robert Mugabe. It's natural that any child would be hit by culture shock from such a move, but the reality proved even harsher when Chawawa arrived in Framingham Pigot in Norfolk. This sleepy, quintessentially English village is the kind of place where multiculturalism can sometimes seem like the made-up stuff of fairy tales.

"In Zimbabwe, Black is beautiful, but it's also the norm. When people talk about experiences, it comes from the heart, and you understand that so much of the world is shaped through the colour that we are," he says.

"When you move to England, there's a bingo card which almost every person of colour carries, which is stuff like 'Have you been called the N-word before?' Or 'Has anyone tried to touch your hair?' That happened to me when someone finished off a bag of Wotsits and tried to dry their fingers off in my Afro.

"And in some sense, those experiences can bind you together. But for me, the shock came from being in a place where you could be the only Black person in your school, or the only Black person in your village. I had odd looks from people on tractors who were driving through the village. It felt like a microaggression at five miles an hour!"

That last quip is trademark Chawawa. He's a comic who is able to tackle lofty subjects such as race, but who always manages to finish with a strong gag that leaves audiences of his recent tour under no illusions about his comedic chops.

It's a skill that stood him in good stead when faced with school bullies who tried to destroy the elephant he made in a woodwork class as a reminder of Zimbabwe and spread false rumours about him being a drug dealer. He says that his humour eventually won over some of his tormentors, while a nice "full-circle moment" came when he was elected as head boy, having previously been an "ostracised new kid".

And besides, he admits, his experiences while living in Framingham Pigot have been ripe for turning into comic gold on his stand-up tour. There's one moment in the show where he reflects on a visit to the town by the Queen and delivers a razor-sharp joke about colonialism and stolen artefacts.

"I'm one of those people who largely believes that if you don't laugh, you'll cry," he says. "And I'm gonna use those experiences to create a tale which we can all laugh [at]. But also, hopefully within that, you can gain the perspective of somebody who, you know, did have to deal with culture shock and was very lonely at times."

He's now living in London and loves that, unlike Framingham Pigot, the city's "thousand creeds and colours" feels completely normal, but says the experience has given him a new unlikely item to put on his vision board – the capital's Lime bikes.

"I need a Lime bike black card! Have done 392 trips this year! That's 392 times I've had to

stand and scan a Lime bike code. At this point, I'm doing the Tour de France, so they need to give me one. That's going on the vision board," he quips.

Before January this year, Chawawa's comic profile was well established on Instagram and on the small screen through appearances on shows such as *Taskmaster* and an irreverent, colour-flipped turn as King Charles in Channel 4's close-to-the-knuckle satire, *Prince Andrew: The Musical*.

But he had never tried stand-up. Before embarking on a full-on stand-up tour, he set himself a daunting challenge of 80 work-in-progress sets at comedy clubs throughout the country. He says the experience was "relatively un-brutal" and explains that the perfectionist in him meant he rehearsed "two weeks, word for word" before his first-ever open-mic night. Even if it was a relatively heckle-free experience, not every crowd interaction went quite the way he had planned.

"There was one gig where I was halfway through, and someone stood up with what looked like a pole and started pushing it along the floor," he remembers. "I stopped the gig and just said, 'Dude, why are you hoovering?' He silently raised a pair of crutches. So that was quite harrowing! I had to recover with sheer flattery: I was complimenting the guy's hairstyle and his shoes. But it was all good, we ended up having a good laugh about it."

It has all helped Chawawa hone the show that I witness in north London on a rainy night in mid-October. From the start, he shows off accomplished crowd work – with one middle-aged white-man in the front immediately told by Chawawa that he'll be called Babatunde for the evening. It's a clever and meaningful spin on the frequent micro-aggressions experienced by people of colour when their names are anglicised out of sheer laziness.

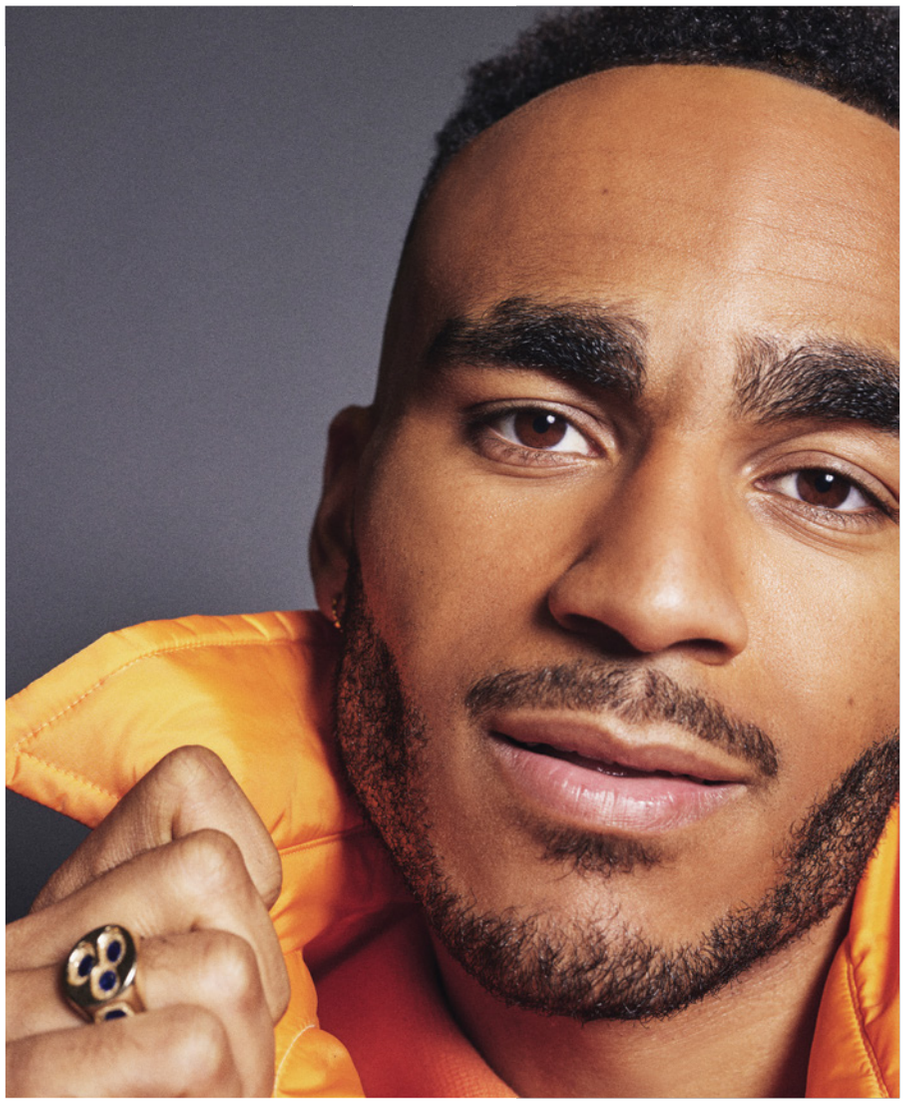
"It's a funny way to show how ridiculous it is that you're not giving someone their actual identity. I've been in a situation where someone has called me William!" he explains.

Elsewhere, there's appearances by Unknown P – the posh Drill rapper persona that landed Chawawa a deal with Atlantic Records – and a sketch on how a childhood love of *Harry Potter* meant his mum had to dish out the books like drugs behind the back of his strict Christian father.

The show's most remarkable moment, though, comes late on as Chawawa sits on a stool and earnestly confesses how a mixture of imposter syndrome, anxiety and male emotional repression he inherited from his father led him to seek therapy for the first time in his life.

"In Zimbabwean culture at least, there are expectations put on a man to be this strong, unshakeable rock at the centre of your family, and that means suppressing your emotions. But I also had the pressure of wanting to be the satirist that I feel like I need to be to earn my place on panel shows and magazine covers," he explains of the candour in that moment of the show.

"It was the conflict between those two things: the immovable object of African masculinity versus the unstoppable force of fast-moving pressure from this new job. I'm very thankful that I didn't have a breakdown and that I was able to talk about it in the show, and channel it positively into conversations with my other male friends and start to define a new type of masculinity within my own life that hopefully one day I can pass on. There was definitely



**THIS PAGE**

MUNYA WEARS TRACKSUIT TOP AND JACKET BY **ONITSUKA TIGER**, RING BY **BLEUE BURNHAM**

**OPPOSITE**

MUNYA WEARS COAT, HOODIE AND BOOTS BY **LANVIN**, TROUSERS BY **GUCCI AT MATCHES**

GROOMING: LUCY THOMAS USING **EXUVIANCE SKINCARE**, **CLINISOOTHE** AND **NARS COSMETICS**

BARBERING: MARK MACIVER AT SLIDER CUTS

FASHION ASSISTANT: AARON PANDHER

pressure, and it intermingled to create something that made me ask, 'Am I going to let this break me, or am I going to break it?'

"In my tour, that is really the catharsis I needed to bury that issue, because I'm the master of it now. I can go onstage and speak about it and be vulnerable and feel like I've addressed it and not hidden it anymore. It was so scary, but so rewarding."

Has his dad – framed in his stand-up as a famously hard-to-please father – seen the show?

"He has seen the show, and he said what he says to everything I've ever done in my life, which is 'That was quite good.' And you know what? I'll take it. That's pretty much a five-star review from my dad," he jokes.

Another person who has seen Chawawa perform is Stormzy, who was full of praise after attending the final night of Chawawa's Kentish Town residency.

"That was another full-circle moment because I was working in an office when I started doing

**"IN ZIMBABWEAN CULTURE, THERE ARE EXPECTATIONS PUT ON A MAN TO BE THIS UNSHAKEABLE ROCK"**

my sketches, and I remember erupting in the middle of the office when I first saw that he'd followed me on Instagram. He's been super supportive, and after that show he just said to me, 'You look like you were shining up there, you were doing your thing, and we were just all so happy and proud to see [you] up there doing your thing.'"

But it was bigger than that too. For Chawawa, it represented the latest step on a whirlwind journey that's led him from Instagram to becoming a TV mainstay and one of British comedy's leading lights.

"I just think to myself, 'I came to London without any friends, family and no roots to lay here.' There's a version of Munya that would have thought, 'How can I possibly turn this into something?' But there was another side that said, 'If you work hard, this city can feel like home.' Those are the moments when I feel grateful for the journey and the way it's happened. All the places have finally connected and got me to the place I am now."

# HYUNJIN

## THE PRINCE OF VERSACE

**With K-pop stars commanding adulation that is off the charts, it's no surprise that major brands are keen for a piece of the action. Recently signed up by Versace as one of its ambassadors, Hyunjin from K-pop sensation Stray Kids chats to Rolling Stone UK about style, his favourite Stray Kids song and which of his band members is "a very naughty boy"**

**BY JOSEPH KOCHARIAN**

# BACK

IN SEPTEMBER, I witnessed the phenomenal popularity of K-pop when I attended Paris Fashion Week. The crowds of fans waiting for their idols to arrive to watch a show were so big that they blocked the roads. While sitting inside waiting for the runway to start, I could gauge when a K-pop idol had appeared due to the enormous cheers that erupted outside, rivalling only those heard at the Super Bowl. This is regular behaviour for K-pop fans – they descend en masse on locations where their heroes might be in the hope of catching a glimpse of their idols, or to scream incoherently with joy at spotting their 'bias' (the term for a favourite band member).

With their high production values and equally high-octane energy, eight-piece band Stray Kids are one of the K-pop groups who can command the level of adulation experienced by One Direction and the Spice Girls, and which K-pop acts BlackPink and BTS still enjoy. The band – whose members are Bang Chan, Lee Know, Changbin, HAN, Felix, Seungmin, I.N and Hyunjin – are racking up record-breaking streams and physical sales for their songs, amassing hundreds of millions of views with their dynamic music videos and performing in front of huge crowds in sold-out arenas. In June, their latest album *5-STAR* earned them their third number one on the Billboard 200.

On an unwavering, determined journey to the top, they are part of the fourth generation of K-pop, a genre which has steadily taken its place on the global music stage over the past 15 years. With such success, K-pop idols are big business, so it's no surprise that luxury brands are keen to tap into their star power. Earlier this year, one of Stray Kids' main dancers, Hyunjin, was welcomed into the Versace fashion family as one of its global ambassadors.

The first thing that happens when I sit down with Hyunjin – often dubbed Prince Hyunjin by his fans – for our interview is that I'm treated to his trademark laugh. STAYs (the name for Stray Kids' fandom) will know the one I mean: where he throws his head back and gives a melodic laugh full of warmth and joy. As he is South Korean, I attempt to greet him in his native language. (I later learn in an email that this was much appreciated by Hyunjin.) Although I am no linguist, this seems to ignite an initial spark of friendliness that sets the tone for our chat.

STAYs will know that Hyunjin has always been into fashion, and the enormity of joining an iconic, international luxury brand such as Versace has not been lost on him. "Versace has always been at the centre of culture, especially music," he says. "So being a part of Versace itself as an artist means a lot and made me feel so honoured and also excited at the same time."

Donatella Versace has been at the heart of the Italian brand since its inception and took over as the brand's creative director after her brother's tragic passing in 1997. She has become a legend of the fashion industry and a household name. Like Hyunjin, Donatella has a magnetic warmth, strong character and big heart that has made her beloved in the fashion world as well as with megastars including Madonna, Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Britney and Cher. For Versace, it's about taking the time to cultivate relationships with the artists as well as dressing them.

Hyunjin's first meeting with Donatella Versace was at the brand's La Vacanza show in Cannes in May this year. "I was a bit nervous when I met her in person, right after the show, but she greeted me with a warm smile and said, 'You are part of the Versace family!' So, I felt better!" he says. "Looking back, it was a brilliant show. The collection itself really matched the beautiful environment of Cannes. I really loved the music as well. It left a lasting impression on my memory."

Stepping out solo was a little daunting, Hyunjin admits. "At first I felt a bit nervous because I was there without my [other band] members," he says. There was no need to worry, however, as a flock of famous faces including Dua Lipa and Troye Sivan fluttered around him. Even A-listers are not immune to the lure of K-pop.

"I had met Dua Lipa before, at an event I attended with Felix [Hyunjin's bandmate], and this time Dua spoke to me first and said, 'Good to see you again!' I felt so grateful for that. It felt so good!"

Meeting Sivan led to a new music collaboration. "With Troye Sivan, we took a picture together, so I felt we were getting closer to each other, then [after the show], he contacted me, and I had an opportunity to feature on his music with the song, 'Rush'," recalls Hyunjin. "It was really fun, and I am looking forward to another chance [to] make [music] together."

It's a sentiment shared by Sivan, who has spoken about being up for more music collaborations with Hyunjin. After meeting him at the Versace show, Sivan was quite vocal about being smitten with the K-pop star and went on a social-media spiral, watching Hyunjin perform and noting in particular that he was blown away by his dance skills.

Performing is, after all, where Hyunjin shines. He draws your eye to him with intricate movements that he makes look effortless. Animal emojis are often allocated to K-pop idols, and Hyunjin's is a ferret – it's not just that he resembles one with his facial expressions, but because of the fluidity of his movements when he dances. (He's also known as 'dumpling' to his bandmates and team members, who in mischievous moments will joke about what would be the perfect temperature to cook him at.)

Hyunjin's dance finesse led to him trending at this year's VMAs, where Stray Kids performed their track, 'S-Class'. Those unfamiliar with the band were trying to

PREVIOUS SPREAD: IMAGE PROVIDED BY VERSACE; OPPOSITE: HYUNJIN WEARS COTTON POPLIN SHIRT, COTTON CHINOS, BAROCCO JACQUARD ODISSEA SNEAKERS, ATHENA MINI TOTE BAG; IMAGE PROVIDED BY VERSACE, PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELO PENNETTA

VERSACE
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**"Versace has always been at the centre of culture, especially music. Being a part of Versace itself as an artist means a lot and made me feel so honoured"**

**POSE** Donatella, Hyunjin and Dua Lipa

find out the identity of the "fine-ass ponytail guy". It was, of course, Hyunjin. Another moment from the evening that went even more viral was footage of Taylor Swift in the audience watching Stray Kids. After an initial reaction of jaw-dropped astonishment, she could be seen bopping along. Taylor's appreciation of Stray Kids' performance didn't go unnoticed online. As I write, the Swiftie and STAY fandoms are flooding an Instagram post of Donatella's with enthusiastic 'Taylor x Hyunjin' comments.

"It was an honour even being [at] the same venue as Taylor!" says Hyunjin. "After the performance at the VMAs, people told me, 'Have you seen this video! Is it real?!' It felt surreal! I hope I could be with her at another event if there is an occasion or opportunity."

As he told me this, I was thinking about which *Reputation* (Taylor's Version) track would best suit a collab with Stray Kids. I cannot promise that I won't launch an online campaign with the STAYs for the eight-piece to collab with Swift on either '...Ready for It' or 'I Did Something Bad'.

Versace has created bespoke pieces for him for all of this year's milestones, including the VMAs. "I also felt grateful to Versace," says Hyunjin. "They gave me lots of support with my outfits, like Lollapalooza in Paris to the recent (Stray Kids) Dome tour, so I feel really pleased to be with Versace in every single way and [for] important moments."

Hyunjin's first Versace duty was starring in its Holiday campaign, which came out in early November. "I was super, super excited" he recalls. "Since it was my first fashion campaign, it was much more meaningful. They took good care of me at the photoshoot, so I could feel really comfortable, and they gave me a lot of inspiration and support. I was really happy to be there." Donatella dressed him up in everything from a shimmering wool and Barocco lurex double-breasted tailored jacket to an acid-green wool coat. Which was his favourite?

"All of the outfits were so unique, interesting and beautiful, he replies. "But I especially loved the long-length coat with the Barocco print on it."

It's easy to see why Versace sought out Hyunjin as an ambassador and model for its Holiday campaign. His beauty is so perfect that once, on a live video stream, he asked earnestly, "Shall I remove the filter?" He then tapped away on the screen for a few moments before realising that there was, in fact, no filter on at all, and that he was simply looking flawless.

His looks are only part of the reason that Hyunjin attracts such a large fanbase. The man who can perform intricate choreography effortlessly is the same person who is simultaneously adorably clumsy and playfully melodramatic with his bandmates. Social media is filled with content examining and curating his smallest nuances: how he dances happily when eating something he loves; a particular dance move that's idiosyncratic to just him; how he crinkles and closes his eyes when he laughs; how he pronounces his bestie Felix's name. Not to make any STAYs jealous, but I got the 'throwing-back-of-the-head laugh', the 'peace signs' and the 'tiny-hand wave' all in one interview...

It's Hyunjin's easy charm and warmth that enables him to connect with his STAYs. The day after I interview him, he is on one of his frequent Instagram live sessions, happily chirping away at 6am with his fans. Fashion is one way in which he bonds with them. He got too hot at one point, so changed into a white and blue Versace top, saying how much he liked it and how cool it was. "When I purchase a new piece, I try to share my outfit with my fans," he says.

Almost a week after our chat, he drove fans wild when he visited the Versace Ginza store in Tokyo to film content for the brand's Holiday campaign. His unannounced appearance there made the national news in Japan, due to the sheer volume of fans who crowded the streets waiting for him. In typical Hyunjin style, he could often be seen peeking from the rails on the first floor and crouching down by the store's giant glass window, doing heart signs, and checking that his fans weren't too chilly waiting out in the cold for him. There is still a humble, appreciative shock on his face as he observes the scene, as if he can't believe that so many people would turn up to see him. He's perhaps the only person in the world who can't fathom the enormity of their star power.

He's not the only member of Stray Kids with an eye for fashion. When it comes to style, each of the band members has their own distinct look, which loyal STAYs love documenting. Whether it's a caked-up Bang Chan in tight PVC trousers and midriff-skimming crop top or HAN in the hottest oversized skater and streetwear brands, the fans have dedicated accounts curating every item of clothing and accessory. Seungmin's preppy wardrobe with oversized blazers and outerwear and Lee Know's 90s-style slogan tees, oversized shirts and cropped preppy jackets bring a lot of minimalist, chic cool to the band's aesthetic. Changbin takes any opportunity to show off his gym gains with skin-tight, sleeveless designer numbers or tees with rolled-up sleeves paired with shiny PVC trousers. Felix has talked about loving the blur between womenswear and menswear, and I.N's penchant for a good piece of knitwear and a luxury designer item all add individuality to the band.

There is, of course, cohesion and overlap in their styles too. For example, Hyunjin and Felix have matching Homaika resin rings that they both wear often. Hyunjin gifted one to Felix when he was looking for a new ring, and Hyunlix (the ship name for their friendship) STAYs are on constant alert to see if they're wearing them or not.

Hyunjin tells me that if he were to borrow clothes from another member, it would be from I.N. "He's really into fashion," he says. "I normally ask his opinion before I buy a piece. I might borrow clothes from I.N if there was a chance to."

But fashion isn't the only thing that sets Stray Kids apart.

OPPOSITE: HYUNJIN WEARS HEAVY WOOL COAT, MEDUSA '95 LOAFERS; IMAGE PROVIDED BY VERSACE, PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELO PENNETTA

**"Normally, I draw objects or scenery, but when I want to express my feelings, I draw portraits. I concentrate for five or six hours and sit still, so I really love that"**

**OCTET** (From left) Bang Chan, Lee Know, Felix, HAN, Seungmin, Changbin, Hyunjin and I.N at the VMAs

HEADED UP BY leader Bang Chan, Stray Kids, unlike most K-pop bands, produce and write their own songs. In November, they released an extended play, *ROCK-STAR*. "I wrote a song for this album. The title is 'Cover Me'. Since I wrote the song, I really like it, and I wish more people would listen to my song," Hyunjin says of the track.

Showcasing Seungmin, Bang Chan and Lee Know's vocals, 'Cover Me', released in early November, has soaring high notes and a cascading melody to match the emotional lyrics. It's a slower-paced, thoughtful track that's already popular with STAYs. Hyunjin has chatted with fans and shared some of the production process, including why he asked Felix to sing the intro to the song and the more melodic parts because of his appreciation of his band mate's singing voice. The pair's bond is evident even in Hyunjin's song-writing.

Hyunjin has written tracks for the band before – most notably, the incredibly passionate 'Red Lights', complete with sensual music video. Apparently, the lyrics he originally wrote were quite bold and were toned down by Bang Chan for the final version. He takes a moment when I ask if he would ever consider releasing the original for the fans who feverishly ask for it, before answering with a mischievous giggle. "I think it might be difficult to release the song, so it will be kept as a memory between me and Bang Chan!"

Next, I ask him what his favourite song from Stray Kids' entire discography is. "I would say it is 'God's Menu'," he replies. "I think it's a symbol of Stray Kids as it implies the beginning of our band. It reminds me of the beginning, so it's one of my favourite songs."

The band has sub-units called 'rachas'. Hyunjin, one of the main dancers of the group, is part of 'Danceracha', along with Felix and Lee Know, who take care of the choreography. It's important for K-pop bands to convey their music creatively through physical performance, and it's no different for *ROCK-STAR*.

"I have to say, it's hard. It's one of the hardest choreographies I have done," he admits. "It also requires a lot of skills and energy, and I must say the performances will be really explosive and will be really good for big stages."

Being part of Stray Kids is long hours and intense work for the octet, but they are a tight and protective group. Like a formation of migrating birds, they fly around the globe together, shielding each other from the swirling chaos and turbulence that comes with being megastars. Refreshingly, they're not afraid to show their feelings, even in front of their sold-out crowds. On stage, they will take each other under their wing, comforting and flocking around a member if he bursts into tears, sharing the moment if someone is overcome with the enormity of what they have achieved, often setting one another off crying in the process. When on a break, sitting on the floor, they lend their shoulders and laps to their bandmates, so they can grab any moment of sleep they can. They snap keepsake photos of each other when enjoying some downtime or visiting a new city and also bake and cook for each other (Felix's brownies are a band favourite). All these moments have made them into a tactile, emotionally affectionate group (even the often wise-cracking Seungmin yields to a hug from Yongbok Felix) whose friendships have been documented on YouTube channels, TikTok and other socials over the years. This close bond helps them get through their never-ending schedules.

With the hard graft comes a lot of laughter. When he's working on choreography, I ask who's the most fun to teach a new dance to. Hyunjin's answer should come as no surprise to STAYs: "I would say Changbin! Changbin is hilarious, and Changbin is a naughty boy! He's always making the mood really happy. The choreography itself is really hard, but at the same time it is really exciting, so we felt that every moment we [practised] the choreography was like a festival."

In the rare moments of downtime, Hyunjin likes to draw and paint. "Normally, I draw objects or scenery, but when I want to express my feelings, I try to draw portraits. I also concentrate my energy on the drawings for around five or six hours and that time makes me sit still, so I really love that," he says.

When I suggest it must be hard for the band members to carve out alone time during their schedules, he says, "Yes, you're right. I have busy days, and I get stressed from the noises or sometimes things are physically challenging, so I appreciate this time to be myself and sitting still."

His laughs hits me again when I ask if he has ever drawn any of his band members.

"I haven't drawn one of my members, and I will not draw my members, as I see them every day. Why bother drawing them in my free time?" he jokes. "But seriously, I really like giving them my drawings as a gift, so I draw their birthday flower as a present and I will do that from now on, but I will not draw their faces."

Then he exclaims: "Ohh. Actually, Changbin asked me to draw him!" This seems on-brand for Changbin, as his star sign, like mine, is Leo, and we love a picture of ourselves, or even just our reflection in the mirror.

How much free time the fans' favourite ferret will find to paint in the near future is unclear, as Stray Kids continue their determined climb to the summit of the music world, while supporting each other like family as they move towards their common goal. But it's clear from Hyunjin's first friendly hello and wave in our interview, to his very last appreciative touch on email that he'll not lose his kindness and appreciation for his fans along the way. Perhaps these attributes are the reason Donatella and Hyunjin gravitated towards one another. These shared qualities mean he fits right into the Versace family. ®

THIS PAGE: IMAGE PROVIDED BY VERSACE; OPPOSITE: HYUNJIN WEARS BAROCCO JACQUARD CASHMERE COAT, CASHMERE SWEATPANTS, BAROCCO JACQUARD ODISSEA SNEAKERS, ATHENA TOTE BAG; IMAGE PROVIDED BY VERSACE, PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELO PENNETTA

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# Roll call

## One of Britain's greatest living playwrights Sir Tom Stoppard on being a music fan, having writer's block and the major revival of his play *Rock 'n' Roll* in London

**By Hannah Ewens**

"I'm one of human nature's fans, really. I could've been a groupie." These are the words of 86-year-old Sir Tom Stoppard minutes after taking an afternoon cigarette break outside Hampstead Theatre. He is enthusiastically recounting the time the director Sir Michael Lindsay-Hogg introduced him to another knighted British gentleman of note, Sir Mick Jagger. Subsequently, Stoppard and Jagger became friendly, and in a full-circle moment The Rolling Stones frontman came to the 2006 opening night of Stoppard's play *Rock 'n' Roll*, which features music by The Rolling Stones. "By that time, I was going to see the band's concerts with the precious access laminate," Stoppard says with a proud grin.

It's here at this theatre that *Rock 'n' Roll* is to have its first major revival in the UK, at Stoppard's suggestion and with his supervision. The plot is too amorphous and discursive to successfully recount in full but the decades-spanning political play, broken up with famous rock music songs as interludes, culminates with two characters going to a Rolling Stones concert in Prague in 1990. After most of the action consisting of sparring wordplay between Jan, a young Czech PhD student and rock music fan, who hates the repressive politics playing out in his home country, and his British Marxist professor, Max, who is a communist, this final scene is a welcome one of love, joy and the simple power of live music.

The last line of *Rock 'n' Roll* is Esme exclaiming that she doesn't care ("*I don't care. I don't care. I don't care.*"). It echoes a central concern of the play: whether or not music is genuinely political – and furthermore if musicians as figures of rebellion are actually political themselves or just want to be rock stars. In one off-hand scene, Jan explains why the police hate the Czech band The Plastic People of the Universe. It's not because they oppose the official policy of the authoritarian state. What drives them crazy about the rock musicians is that they're indifferent. "They're not actually ideological, they just want to play their music and they don't care about communism or anti-communism – they're musicians, artists, pagans. The police resent them because they don't care," Stoppard explains, fully reclining on a sofa on an upper floor of the theatre, adding that, "This thing of 'I don't care, I don't care.' That is what every generation feels at a certain point."

For Stoppard, music has been recreational and inspirational in his life, but not political. "I quite often have been listening only virtually to one track while writing a particular play," he recalls. "I remember when I wrote a play called *Arcadia*, I was listening to [The Rolling Stones'] 'You Can't Always Get What You Want'. I played it and played it and played it. I don't know why it was that one. It was like a drug, really." Music matters, his work suggests, just maybe not in all the ways that we want it to.

He may not be a rock star but in many ways Stoppard, who became an overnight success during the swinging 60s, is the Mick Jagger of theatre. He doesn't look dissimilar for starters. In the years that followed, Stoppard was pictured in editorials with a shag haircut, snappy style and cigarette in hand, his love life was a hot topic in certain literary and media circles, and he was swiftly known for being prolific and immensely talented. Today, he is still best described as Daphne Merkin once did in the *New York Times*, looking "like a lounge lizard who reads Flaubert". His plays are never simple: they're impressive displays of discourse, a literary fight between science and philosophy, with characters typically existing to be a conduit for ideas rather than as part of human dramas in their own right. The likes of *Arcadia* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* have been mainstays of A-level English courses, presumably picked for their brilliance in confusing teens across the country. Stoppard "matters", Hermione Lee wrote in her 2020 biography of the man, "he will be remembered."

> **"Before I knew where I was, I was married and listening to 'Hey Jude' in my own house, living a suburban life"**

Before writing for the stage, Stoppard was a freelance culture journalist, exchanging words for free nights out to plays and live music. One day, while he was working at a pop-culture title *Scene Magazine*, his colleague and future novelist Gordon Williams came into the office with black and white photographs of a little-known band called The Beatles. "It was like someone saying: 'I have heard the future,'" Stoppard remembers. "Very shortly after that, one was listening to 'Love Me Do'; before you knew where you were, it was 'A Hard Day's Night' and 'Help'. Before I knew where I was, I was married and listening to 'Hey Jude' in my own house outside London near Maidenhead where my wife worked, living a more suburban life."

Despite his passion for music, Stoppard doesn't have a musical ear and says he usually discovers music through personal recommendations. For instance, Pink Floyd – whose music is also played in *Rock 'n' Roll*, and whose members are also now personal contacts of his – became one of his favourite bands after two of his sons

© MATT HUMPHREY

Tom Stoppard with the late director Howard Davies at Hampstead Theatre

MANUEL HARLAN

continually played them at home when they were younger. "I'm always a bit embarrassed about me and music because I don't have a musical brain," Stoppard admits, adding that the speed with which people recognise what a particular song is on *University Challenge* baffles him. "It's an odd one because you'd think that if you love something a lot, it will be because you understand what it is. Conversely, you might think if you get to understand something really well, it makes you love it. So, it's a reciprocal thing, like a loop. But it's not like that with me. I genuinely love the things I love but I couldn't hum them, I don't understand. If I'm actually watching music, I'm staring at the guitarist's fingers trying to see what's happening and I never can. Everybody's got one thing that they wish they'd done, and for me, that's what it is. Even going into a pub, and there's somebody banging out music on an upright in a corner in a bar, I feel so envious of the ability to do that."

**"If I'm actually watching music, I'm staring at the guitarist's fingers trying to see what's happening and I never can"**

Of all his plays, it feels culturally fitting that this one should get a revival in 2023. The vast majority of mainstream rock music over the past decade has been created for aesthetics and feeling rather than for any real engagement with politics and culture. There's the fact that one of *Rock 'n' Roll*'s themes is that of moral exhibitionism: posturing and demonstrating moral superiority has never been more prevalent than in a social media age. But Stoppard says this play is happening now simply because he wanted it to have another life. "Constantly what one gets is 'Can you explain why this is still relevant?' And I don't give a toss about it being relevant," he says casually. "It's not the point for me. Theatre is recreational, it takes all kinds of stuff." Yes, the play is about politics but it's also about being human, eroticism, time, the poet Sappho, philosophy. Besides, Stoppard just really loves his play.

Like the character Jan, Stoppard was born in Czechoslovakia, escaping just before the Nazis, and came with his family to England. "The play hits a certain chord for me because it gathered up a lot of myself. My place of birth, my politics such as they were, my taste in music," he says. Much of what happened as a result of this play moved him emotionally. For instance, when the play was in rehearsals in London originally, Stoppard invited The Plastic People to meet the acting company, and he got to be an acquaintance of the band once again. Then, when the play was put on in Czech and he went to Prague to watch it, the floor of the stage elevated and The Plastic People were playing underneath, which was, he says, one of the greatest moments of his life. Critics in the 2000s remarked that this was his most warm or human play yet – something that was a surprise to Stoppard too. "I'm quite a romantic," he admits, "so I was quite pleased by the fact that I realised I'd got a love story going here. Because I don't invent the play before I start, I just invent it as I go."

He's equally delighted that a play with 20 characters like *Rock 'n' Roll* could work for a revival. "It's quite expensive to do a play nowadays," he says of this. "It's a truism but it's true enough that if you write plays that need a dozen people, quite complex sets, it gets more and more hard to find a place for a play – it's to do with budget. I keep thinking I must write one of those other plays where you just put the lights on – two men in a basement."

That future work is forever in his mind. Are there specific plays he wants to write during the rest of his life? "When I was young and healthy, I could do a play every four years, and I've been trying to get into a particular topic for about a year now. I keep waiting for things to get past me like this, so I can go back to it and get it moving and started properly," he says with a sigh. "I've been very frustrated. So, the short answer is: I don't have a play, although I'm old enough to retire. If you decide to retire, maybe you feel it doesn't matter that 'I don't have a play'. But it doesn't feel like that. It feels as though I haven't stopped yet, so I hope I haven't." He's been staying in London at his wife's flat for the duration of the rehearsals for *Rock 'n' Roll*. When the play opens in early December, Stoppard plans to return to Dorset and get back to his writer's table, to quite literally put fountain pen to paper (he doesn't own a computer). "There's this wonderful Samuel Beckett line," he says of his plan to try again at another play. "Fail better."

As for his music fandom, he fits the typical mould of being a fan for life. "I kept my faith with The Rolling Stones right up to the present moment, and also with Pink Floyd. I was terribly thrilled to know these people – still am. But I feel that I'm now in nostalgia mode," he says, and pauses knowingly before delivering his best line with a smile. "I'm not listening to Taylor Swift. Though I'm sure I'd probably love it if I did."

# Escape from CHAOS

With their fourth album for nearly nine years dropping in March next year, The Libertines' Pete Doherty and Carl Barât speak of leaving their demons behind to create this record from a rare place of harmony – while also displaying a new sense of social conscience

## By Nick Reilly

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED COOKE

"WE WERE IN A GLASS STUDIO at the top of a hill in the middle of a hurricane," recalls The Libertines' Pete Doherty. "All these birds kept getting confused and flying into the glass. There was a full-on eagle flying straight into it and, in the middle of all this, the Queen's funeral was on the telly. It was quite apocalyptic really."

Scenes like these, which occurred when Doherty and bandmate Carl Barât decamped to Jamaica for a writing trip in late 2022, feel perfectly representative of the way that The Libertines have existed for the past 20 years: constantly teetering on the thinnest of precipices between success and unparalleled chaos.

When the group first emerged at the turn of the century, they were the poster boys for England's latest rock'n'roll revolution, a direct answer to the New York indie scene that was exploding across the pond, spearheaded by The Strokes.

There were shades of Mick and Keef in the brotherly, love-hate relationship between Barât and Doherty too, while the group's first two albums – 2002's *Up the Bracket* and 2004's *The Libertines* – spawned a slew of era-defining indie anthems.

But wherever The Libertines went, turmoil followed. The group became slowly fractured, in large part due to Doherty's much-publicised battle with heroin addiction, before splitting in 2004.

Nineteen years later, it's a very different state of play for the Likely Lads. Doherty has been clean of hard drugs since 2020, while the group – which also consists of bassist John Hassall and drummer Gary Powell – are readying themselves for the release of their fourth album *All Quiet on the Eastern Esplanade* in March next year.

The follow-up to 2015's *Anthems for Doomed Youth* is, according to Barât, the sound of a band in the most harmonious part of their career to date. "Our last album was a snapshot of The Libertines in disarray, whereas this album reflects The Libertines when we're not like that," Barât tells me. "There's more harmony at the moment, which is useful for a band, innit. Things had drifted off at some point, but now I think they're nicely back together again."

One listen to the new record and it is immediately clear what Barât means. The ramshackle charm of their early work is back once more, but it's tempered with a sense of reflecting on their here and now. Lead single 'Run, Run, Run' is a classic Libs back-and-forth between Doherty and Barât, but it also homes in on the idea of being a "lifelong project of a life on the lash" – something these two forty-something musicians can more than relate to.

"It's autobiographical. It's about us, it's about time, and it's about the world moving on and you know, not knowing if you're running towards something or away from something," Barât says.

It's also helped by the fact that The Libertines have their own bonafide HQ down in Margate too. The album was recorded at the Albion Rooms, the studio and hotel that the group set up in 2019. "We were all there living together. First at the Albion Rooms and then at this place in Normandy, where I live," says Doherty. "It felt like a collective, but we became this little unit, on a mission to get this album done."

In the following interview, Doherty and Barât share the whole story behind *All Quiet on the Eastern Esplanade*.

**"Our last album was a snapshot of The Libertines in disarray, whereas this album reflects The Libertines when we're not like that" — *BARÂT***

**We're speaking hours after 'Run, Run, Run' was released. How do you feel now that the first Libertines song in eight years is out there?**

**Doherty:** I'm fucking excited. Not that I was never not excited about things we've released, but you hear this one on the radio, and it really hits what we call the sweet spot. It hits with a precision that you might compare to a guided missile, though in the current climate it might not be appropriate to talk about guided missiles. But look, I'm proud of the lads. We've hit the back of the net, and I'm over the moon.

**Carl, you said recently that 2015's *Anthems for Doomed Youth* never felt like a proper Libertines album. Why was that and why does this record feel like a proper album?**

**Barât:** It does feel like I've given that album a kicking, but I do love it. It was just a snapshot of the Libertines in disarray, whereas this one is a snapshot of us not in disarray. Which is just lucky timing and helpful when you're making an album, innit?

**Doherty:** I just want to say one more thing about 'Run, Run, Run'. We reached a point late on where we only had nine finished songs, and we were scratching around for a brand-new song when Carl pulled that one out and played it. I just said, "Where have you been fucking hiding that?!" He wasn't sure about it and whether to hide it, but we ended up recording it in two days straight. We have these weird, sacred moments where we play each other the songs we've come up [with], and we're never sure what everyone else will think. Carl was unsure about it, but I said we had to record it the minute I heard it.

**There's been a fair bit of drama in your own friendship too over the years. Where do we find Pete and Carl in 2023?**

**Barât:** I feel like being together and doing what we do without any distractions has naturally brought us together. We've got so much in common, and we've shared so much, and our chemistry together is unchanging. At this time, we're in the best possible place I think we can be.

**Doherty:** I think I'm just a little bit more relaxed these days. Without the fug, the sleeplessness, and the frenzy and always looking to score drugs. That's all gone, but the lust for still trying to find the perfect song and turning to Carl and saying, "What have you got, turn out your pockets" when it comes to song ideas. And then there's the business side too.

**The business side too? This sounds like a different Pete to the one of old...**

**Doherty:** Yeah, well, we're looking to

**TEAM LIBERTINES**
(From top) Gary Powell, John Hassall, Carl Barât and Pete Doherty

commercialise things 'cos we need to keep the Albion Rooms ticking over if we want to keep the venue and studio going. That's hard work as we get a lot of young bands in to help them out. We're not turning over a profit, but we're staying afloat, which is exactly what we wanted with the Albion Rooms. And with energy prices being what they are too, I wanted to build a wind farm at the Albion Rooms.

**A wind farm?!**

**Doherty:** Yeah! I wanted to get a mini wind farm put on our studio extension, so I had the idea to put a small turbine on the roof. But you're not allowed to do that, which for me doesn't make any sense because surely that's what we're looking to do, isn't it? For people to be self-sustaining and using renewable energy. We should get every street to have its own mini turbine. But the council in Margate wouldn't let us do it.

**It sounds like you're living a more Zen existence in 2023...**

**Doherty:** We used to live in a squat in Albion Road in Stoke Newington, and I was always amazed by this fella who used to live in a caravan out the back who ran the squat. We used to call him Delvin the Wizard, and he'd generate the power for his caravan on a converted exercise bike. I always thought that was amazing. It had never occurred to me before [that] that side of society existed. People who just wanted to break free from the system or live off-grid. But it's actually quite simple, and it's even more so the case now. We've got the technology for it, solar panels and wind turbines. So yeah, I'm all for a fucking green revolution, me. But a proper one, to put the power back in the hands of the people and to let them pedal their own fucking power! Why not? It makes perfect sense.

**Pete, this is the first Libertines album you've made since becoming clean of drugs in 2020. How has the process changed in that sense? Less shambolic, I imagine?**

**Doherty:** I just never used to enjoy being in the studio. I never really tried to spend too much time in there. It was always a question of having the songs ready, recording them, and then pissing off, to be blunt about it. I had better things to do; I wanted to score. But this time around, the songs weren't ready, so I had to be there with Carl and the

boys, finishing off the ones we have and then writing others together.

It was touch and go for a while for those first few weeks because we were trying to get into the pattern of living together – on top of each other. But fortunately, we were all in the same space and we really wanted to get it done. The most difficult part was the lyrics. We'd put the lyrics off until it became this mad blur of broken typewriters, I think we went through about six of them.

**Barât:** What's that old saying? A fair day's work for a fair day's reward. We eventually managed to get around to that.

**There's a social urgency on this record, unlike other Libertines albums too. There's the image of what it's like to be a refugee in Brexit Britain on 'Merry Old England'.**

## "I'm more relaxed these days. Without the fug, the sleeplessness, and the frenzy and always looking to score drugs. That's all gone" — *DOHERTY*

**Barât:** For me, we've always written about escape, and maybe there's been a change in how we've embraced the world. But there's definitely still an escapist element too, because we're centring songs around Margate, which is where we're ultimately based.

**You've always discussed this feted ideal of Albion in your songs, which is an Old English name for Great Britain. How would you describe Albion in 2023?**

**Doherty:** It's many things. It can be two twins sat at home watching an old clip of a Libertines video, and their dad going, "Who's this? The local pub band?" It's a taxi driver short-changing a tourist. It's a taxi driver being really kind to a tourist. It's a little feeling in my stomach. It's hard to describe it, but it's a sense of homeliness, a recurring theme you've always come back to.

**Pete, what's an average day like for you in 2023? You seem to be living what seems like a rural and idyllic existence.**

**Doherty:** I don't know. Mind your business. My wife always complains when I say too much about our life. We're trying to build a life for ourselves, and I just keep my head down really. I'll walk the dogs in the forest, look after my new baby, watch a bit of telly. Do a bit of writing. I'd be lying if I said it was all perfect, but that's we're doing. Living it together and trying to build a life.

**You both went to Jamaica in 2022 for a writing trip. How much of it was writing and how much of it was trying to strengthen your friendship?**

**Doherty:** People thought we were off to Jamaica to just drink loads of rum, take loads of coke and go round on paddleboards. It wasn't like that at all. We genuinely got our heads down to make some decent tunes and thought we had done, but when we got back it was all over the place.

**Barât:** Some of the stuff we recorded there did end up on the record. We had to have that trip because we weren't necessarily ready to be full Libertines again, and we needed to go somewhere really far away. Why not pick somewhere really beautiful while you're at it?

**It seems like you're both in a really good space, then. Was there ever a point over the past 20 years when you didn't think you'd get here?**

**Barât:** I've had a lifelong battle with depression of my own, to be honest with you. Pete's problems didn't help, but I always did my best to be supportive and understanding because we all have these problems and were never able to name them. Whether it's depression or addiction, but I've had a lot of chaos and my own problems.

**Doherty:** It's taken some absolutely unearthly skills for me to be standing here. Well, not standing, but slouching. I think I've been pretty on my toes, to be honest, dodging bullets. I'm full of holes [points to needle marks in his arms] but the bones are just about holding together. I'm battle-scarred and stumbling, but still here.

**Pete, how often do you think about your friends that weren't so lucky? You were close friends with Amy Winehouse.**

**Doherty:** It's quite difficult for me to talk about. Both Amy and Alan Wass [Doherty's friend who died of a heroin injection], I listen to their music most days. So, I do think about it all, but I'd rather just not say offhand comments. My heart breaks when I think about some things, and this is just one of them.

**But ultimately though, there's a sense of harmony in The Libertines at the moment?**

**Doherty:** Yeah, and the Albion Rooms has been a huge part of that. There's no better feeling in the world, for me, than just sitting there in the gloom of an afternoon as some young band rolls up. They really believe in what they're doing and getting out their guitars, tuning up and going through their songs while the low Margate sun shines through. I just love that. That's what it's about, and it just takes me back because they were the best moments for me in our early days. Just getting our guitars out and making a proper bit of noise. ®

# Great Love tells many stories

The Great Love campaign is a celebration of the UK's diverse LGBTQIA+ community and their stories. Find out more at greatcampaign.com

**Rico Jacob Chase, Entrepreneur & Activist/Director of TransActual UK**

I felt Trans at an early age, but it took me a long time to appreciate my identity. I received a necklace from a romantic partner who loved me unconditionally - I wear it to remind me I'm worthy of love. We worked together backstage at UK Black Pride in 2019 - looking out at the sea of POC and queer people 10 thousand strong, the healing power of community and belonging was overwhelming.

GREAT
BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND

# Reviews

Music

## LUNAR ECLIPSE

*The grace, gravity and beauty of Peter Gabriel's world*

**Peter Gabriel**

i/o

REAL WORLD

★★★★☆

FROM THEATRICAL PROG showman to incisive solo star, world music pioneer, art-rock heartthrob and globe-hugging futurist, the evolution of Peter Gabriel over 50 years has made him something of a post-prog Bowie. This century, in wizard beard and sci-fi tunic, he's come to encapsulate in sound and mindset the organic mysticism of seemingly magical new technologies.

His last album of new material, 2002's *Up*, couched fundamental human experience – birth, death, fear, grief, tragedy – in the signal-and-noise textures of the technological age, while foreseeing society's ➔

ILLUSTRATION BY
**Michael Dunbabin**

### PETER GABRIEL

moral demise in its *Jerry Springer* pop pastiche 'The Barry Williams Show'. This follow-up, begun alongside *Up* back in 1995 but repeatedly reworked and delayed until over 20 years separated them, initially seemed an updated continuation piece. Released track by track every full moon for maximum ancient/modern mystique, *i/o*'s first run of singles advanced *Up*'s dark industrial art rock with a rich, imposing ambience courtesy of Brian Eno, without sacrificing the earthy, Afrobeat funk that has provided the tonal backbone of Gabriel's music since 1980's seminal third self-titled album.

Thematically, *i/o* strode forth into the socio-political future-present. 'Panopticom' envisions an AI-enabled world in which surveillance culture is turned back upon the watchers via satellites, the idea propelling Gabriel from oppressive 'Digging in the Dirt' verses to an energised chorus recalling his 1977 solo debut.

'The Court' mechanises the ancient tribal rhythms of 1982's fourth album (aka *Security*) and adds a haunting choir of judgement to a song pondering the warped justice of cancel culture.

'Four Kinds of Horses' – all Depeche Mode atmospherics, spirit choirs and yearning diodes played by Eno on "electric worms" – sensitively dissects the tragic naivety of religious faith corrupted into terrorism. And later the soul pop 'Olive Tree' imagines a future where a headset can turn our thoughts into pictures, the song's protagonist using it to connect from afar with his favourite tree.

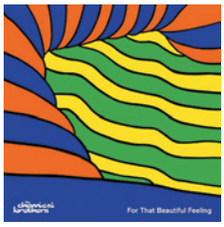
Tucked among the album's first half, though, is a hint of deeper, slow-pulsing concerns. 'Playing for Time' is a sublime piano ballad lightly brushed with Randy Newman jazz chords and swept and lifted by the New Blood Orchestra, facing down death with a resigned nobility. As the album progresses, mortality, grief and the final search for peace come to dominate. Austere piano lament 'So Much' desolately details the inevitable decay of our limited-edition bodies. 'And Still' is a tribute to Gabriel's recently departed mother, meandering through grief's empty, yet cluttered house ("*your presence everywhere*") with weaving stylistic variety.

If such moments can drag *i/o* towards despondence, there's brightness too. A coma patient comes round in a blast of jubilant electro-funk on 'Road to Joy', Gabriel's best pure pop moment since 'Sledgehammer'. The strident arena pop title track ('i/o' standing for input/output) celebrates the ever-flowing interconnectivity of man and planet from the ideas on our feeds to the insects in our graves. And 'Live and Let Live' closes the album wishing for a global self-forgiveness that might see us "lay the weapons down". Gabriel's panoptic vision of the modern world is a cautionary and fatalistic one but, as ever, he makes us want to live deep, deep inside it. **MARK BEAUMONT**

Rolling Stone UK GUIDE

BY NICK REILLY & WILL RICHARDS

# The best of 2023

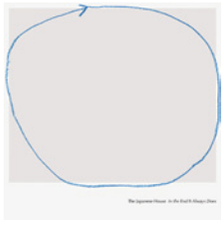


## The Chemical Brothers

### For That Beautiful Feeling

Through their studio albums and lauded live show, The Chemical Brothers have been at the vanguard of popular electronic music for the entirety of their 30-year career. Making music fit for arenas and festivals while breaking both sonic and visual boundaries at every turn, Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands are the most important figures in UK dance music this century.

Their 10th studio album *For That Beautiful Feeling* continues this experimentation, seeing them push into psychedelia while maintaining their penchant for penning world-beating four-to-the-floor hits. Through collaborations with Beck and Halo Maud, they push their sound in new directions while keeping a tight hold of their still-fresh essence. As interconnected and thematic as their live shows, the album travels from dancefloor euphoria to a blissed-out conclusion, working in dance-funk ('No Reason'), pop melody ('Feels Like I Am Dreaming') and slices of darkness ('Magic Wand') along the way. The album's constant resistance to the familiar or comfortable underlines The Chemical Brothers' continued commitment to evolution, and for that they are the winners of The Album Award, supported by Brooklands Studio *(see interview on page 102)*.



## The Japanese House

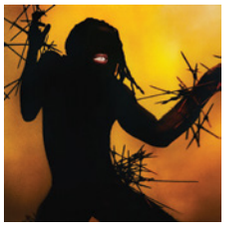
### In the End It Always Does

Amber Bain's second album as The Japanese House takes the foundations of debut LP *Good at Falling* and stretches them in all directions. *In the End It Always Does* is more catchy, more emotionally intelligent and heartfelt and possesses catchier pop hooks. Featuring collaborations with MUNA and The 1975's Matty Healy, the album features alt-pop bangers ('Friends', 'Touching Yourself') and devastating odes to heartbreak ('One for Sorrow, Two for Joni Jones'), all tied together by Bain's inch-perfect songwriting and rich, atmospheric layers of synths and guitars. It solidifies her as a consistent and stand-out songwriting force in British alt-pop.

## Lankum

**False Lankum**

Dublin quartet Lankum's Mercury Prize-nominated fourth album *False Lankum* features versions of songs up to hundreds of years old, but every note is brought firmly into the band's intriguing, disturbing world. Traditional classics 'Go Dig My Grave' and 'The New York Trader' are burnt, blackened and transformed by the band through the use of foreboding drones. The fact that the two originals – 'Netta Perseus' and closer 'The Turn' – fit so seamlessly into the album's story and sound, proves that Lankum approach their source material not just with reverence, but a determination to break out of their boundaries.



## Young Fathers

**Heavy Heavy**

Their fourth album sees Young Fathers continue to tread their unique, idiosyncratic path, with the results more invigorating than ever. The chemistry between Alloysious Massaquoi, Kayus Bankole and Graham Hastings is like little else in music, and their vocals weave in and out of each other through songs that are giddy and energetic ('Rice', 'Drum', 'Sink or Swim'), dark and dangerous ('I Saw') and delicately beautiful ('Tell Somebody', 'Geronimo'). "*Life's so boring when you're already the best*," they sing on 'Holy Moly', instead more interested in "*the story when you go beyond the edge*". To follow them on this expedition is simply thrilling.

## Blur

**The Ballad of Darren**

From the off, *The Ballad of Darren* is defined by a deep sense of loss but proves to be all the more affecting for it. Albarn has been vague about the meaning, but a recent interview saw him subtly alluding to his separation from his long-time partner earlier this year. But even when the themes are heavy, songs like 'St Charles Square' zip along with the verve of Blur's 90s anthemic highs. The sombre 'Barbaric', meanwhile, where Albarn discusses his split, is one of their most powerful songs. With their ninth album, Blur have managed to retain every ounce of the musicality that made them such a brilliant prospect in the first place.

## Romy

**Mid Air**

Romy's debut solo single 'Lifetime' arrived in 2022 with a hurricane of energy and joy, as if the singer had been waiting for years to show off her love of the dancefloor, having made her name shoegazing and singing in hushed tones at the front of The xx. Debut album *Mid Air* carries this energy on brilliantly, calling back to pop hero Robyn and '90s trance classics on an album of euphoria and healing. Its highlight, 'Strong', is a paean to strength in community and transmitted through an ecstatic dance beat.

## Raye

**My 21st Century Blues**

The road to releasing a debut album for Raye has been a long one. The London singer made headlines in 2021 when she alleged on social media that Polydor, her record label at the time, had been holding back her debut LP for seven years. After an acrimonious split, Raye's debut shows her off as a singularly brilliant British music talent. 'Escapism' is a tale of heartbreak wrapped in the shape of a pop banger, while 'Oscar Winning Tears' is a vocal-led epic that immediately puts her up there with the country's best. Hers is a tale of triumph and a win for independent artists everywhere.

## Jorja Smith

**Falling or Flying**

When Jorja Smith released her debut album *Lost & Found* in 2018, it was clear that her talent could define British soul for the next decade. While that first record was full of sultry, one-tempo numbers, this second album sees her head off in a new direction entirely. There are bass drums and bone-rattling percussion on 'Try Me', while the Nia Archives-featuring 'Little Things' is up there as one of 2023's club bangers. And there's plenty for old-school fans too. Haunting ballad 'Broken Is the Man' shows off Smith's stirring vocals, while break-up anthem 'Backwards' also hits hard. Having established a new and powerful sound, Smith is well on her way to becoming a voice of a generation.

## J Hus

**Beautiful and Brutal Yard**

After three years of near silence, J Hus's third album sees him return with a record that acknowledges his lofty place in UK rap. "*They know I'm a Goat*," comes his not-so-subtle salvo on the opening track. A bold claim, perhaps, but one that he justifies throughout the record. Here is an album where sultry Afrobeats hits ('Massacre') sit naturally alongside party-starting tracks like the Drake-featuring 'Who Told You'. Similarly, there are furious Drill flavours on 'Nice Body' (featuring Jorja Smith) and a club anthem in waiting on 'Killy'. It's great to have Hus back.

## Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds

**Council Skies**

"It's going back to the beginning. Daydreaming, looking up at the sky and wondering about what life could be," Noel Gallagher said earlier this year of *Council Skies*. His fourth album with High Flying Birds takes stock of his thrilling journey, resulting in some of the best songs of his solo career. There's a touching conversation with his younger self on the psych-tinged 'Easy Now', while the title track drips with a 60s-esque continental swagger. When the solo material is as good as this, an Oasis reunion looks as far away as ever.

Priscilla (Cailee Spaeny) was just 21 when she married Elvis (Jacob Elordi)

# Film

# THE KING AND I

***What was it like being married to Elvis? With its subject's blessing,* Priscilla *depicts the less-than-perfect reality***

**Priscilla**

STARRING Cailee Spaeny, Jacob Elordi, Ari Cohen

DIRECTED BY Sofia Coppola

★★★★☆

SOFIA Coppola's telling of the Priscilla Presley story is a fitting riposte to Baz Luhrmann's bombastic *Elvis*, which put his wife on the sidelines of the story. It also shows the singer in a rather less flattering light: charming but entitled and controlling of his younger girlfriend.

We first meet Priscilla Beaulieu (Cailee Spaeny) when she's living with her parents on a US airbase in Wiesbaden, Germany. Elvis (Jacob Elordi) is serving in the military there, and his parties are the talk of the expat town. When 14-year-old Priscilla is invited to accompany a man and his wife to one of said parties, this already seems a little inappropriate, and Priscilla's parents raise an eyebrow. When 24-year-old Elvis immediately takes a shine to their daughter, they're troubled further, but fame, flattery and a little scheming mean that Priscilla is soon enjoying a chaste courtship with the man every woman in America wants to date.

Based on the memoirs of Priscilla Presley, who is also an executive producer, Coppola's film is a little slow-moving. But once you settle into the meditative pace, it's a fascinating look at the power of celebrity in a time before social media, #MeToo and other factors that could have changed the course of this relationship.

The influence of the tabloids is evident, however: Priscilla ends up closed off in an ivory tower, the newspapers her only source of information about Elvis's potential exploits with other women. It's a poignant look at a lonely life, and I found it more disturbing – or at least unsettling – than romantic. Spaeny plays Priscilla as convincingly childlike: innocent, shy and high-voiced. Meanwhile, Elordi – recently seen in *Saltburn* (reviewed opposite) – plays Elvis as quixotic and complicated. Coppola doesn't paint him as a villain, or indeed Priscilla as a victim – there are a few sweet scenes between them. But she does present a picture of a challenging marriage to an often-selfish man. She's not shy of dark comedy – the ridiculousness of Elvis's girlfriend being sent to a convent school is played for gentle laughs. And the film is visually excellent, from the cinematography to the costumes and hair and makeup, which are used to colour the characters, emphasising Priscilla's tiny frame.

As for the soundtrack, the Elvis estate didn't give the rights to his music, so instead we hear the likes of The Ramones and a poignant finale featuring 'I Will Always Love You', which it's said Elvis sang to Priscilla during their divorce. Elvis was never granted the rights to record the song, so we're treated to the original Dolly Parton version. That feels like a very fitting touch. *5 JANUARY*

**ANNA SMITH**

*PRISCILLA*: PHILIPPE LE SOURD. COURTESY OF CHANEL; *SALTBURN*: COURTESY OF MGM AND AMAZON STUDIOS; *POOR THINGS*: COURTESY OF SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES; *SCALA!!!!*: BFI DISTRIBUTION

Oliver (Barry Keoghan) in *Saltburn*

# A SUMMER TO REMEMBER

**Saltburn**

STARRING
Barry Keoghan, Jacob Elordi, Richard E Grant, Rosamund Pike, Alison Oliver

DIRECTED BY
Emerald Fennell

★★★★☆

**A RIOTOUSLY DARK** romp around an English mansion, *Saltburn* is the latest attention-grabbing film from writer-director Emerald Fennell, who scored an Oscar for *Promising Young Woman*. Ostensibly the story of a working-class boy who ends up befriending a rich kid at Oxford Uni, it takes various twists and turns until it almost wears itself out. But overall, it's a hoot.

Barry Keoghan plays Oliver, an uncool student who dreams of hanging out with the likes of Felix Catton (Jacob Elordi), who's handsome, privileged and absolutely loaded. After the two become friends, Felix invites Oliver to spend the summer at his country estate, Saltburn, a grand family home with various eccentric rich folk rattling around the corridors. Chief of these is Sir James Catton (Richard E Grant) but eclipsing him in every sense is his wife Elspeth (Rosamund Pike), a melodramatic, self-absorbed matriarch who's utterly deaf to the realities of the world outside Saltburn. As Oliver becomes closer to many members of the family, the plot thickens and this comedy morphs into a thriller with guts. It's messy and overlong, but it's also hilarious, with a few things to say about white male privilege. And the soundtrack is full of bangers, from The Killers to some judiciously used Sophie Ellis-Bextor. *OUT NOW* **ANNA SMITH**

# THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

**Poor Things**

STARRING
Willem Dafoe, Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo

DIRECTED BY
Yorgos Lanthimos

★★★★☆

**FANS OF *THE FAVOURITE*** will be flocking to the latest fantasy from director Yorgos Lanthimos, who reunites with star Emma Stone and screenwriter Tony McNamara for this darkly comic blast of Victoriana. Based on Alasdair Gray's novel, it's a Frankenstein-style story of a crazy scientist and his creation who goes on to exceed his expectations. Willem Dafoe is Dr Godwin Baxter, who implants the brain of a child in the body of a resuscitated dead woman (yes, really). So Bella (Stone) is effectively a baby in a human's body, and watching her – and the film – evolve is fascinating. Tellingly, men are infatuated by Bella, including lawyer Duncan Wedderburn (an OTT Mark Ruffalo). Duncan and Bella's travels take them to a fish-eyed steampunk Lisbon, then onto a spectacular cruise ship, before landing in the brothels of Paris, and a breakout turn from Suzy Bemba. Stone is fantastic, laugh-out-loud funny and may just break the record for the number of orgasms in an Oscar contender. That said, aspects of this story about female sexual emancipation are potentially problematic, especially around the question of mental age and consent. But its payoff is certainly a memorable feminist statement. *12 JANUARY* **ANNA SMITH**

Emma Stone plays a woman with the brain of a child

The Scala cinema closed in 1993

## PICTURE THE SCENE

**Scala!!!**

STARRING
Nick Kent, John Waters

DIRECTED BY
Jane Giles, Ali Catterall

★★★★☆

**IF YOU MISS THE SMELL** of musty cinema carpets soaked with booze and goodness knows what else, *Scala!!! Or, the Incredibly Strange Rise and Fall of the World's Wildest Cinema and How It Influenced a Mixed-up Generation of Weirdos and Misfits* is for you. The King's Cross cinema the Scala was a legendary institution in the 1980s, showing everything from sexploitation to arthouse to queer cinema. It had an eventful history, as traced by directors Jane Giles and Ali Catterall, and gleefully outlined by a series of interviewees from Mary Harron to Adam Buxton. Their anecdotes alone make this worth seeing, but there's also archive footage and inventive animation to bring the venue back to life. If you remember those days, it'll be nostalgic; if you're too young, you'll be agog at what people used to get away with in the cinema. That one, anyway. *5 JANUARY* **ANNA SMITH**

# THE TOP 23 BRITISH FILMS OF 2023

From thought-provoking to quirky to heartwarming or hilarious, here's our pick of the year's finest homegrown flicks

BY ANNA SMITH

On a journey of discovery

## 1

## Typist Artist Pirate King

**Directed by Carol Morley**

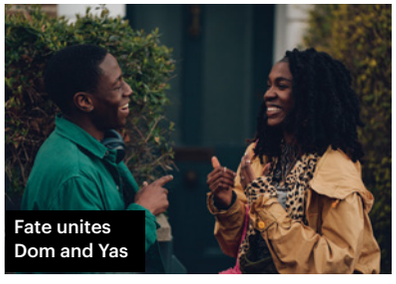
Actress Monica Dolan is a delight in Carol Morley's roadtrip drama, in which she plays Audrey Amiss, an artist who persuades her psychiatric nurse (Kelly Macdonald) to drive her across Britain. An imaginative take on a real-life character, it's charming, poignant and witty with lovely supporting turns from Gina McKee and Kieran Bew.

Sexy Tara and Badger

## 2 How to Have Sex

**Directed by Molly Manning Walker**

Young Brits party abroad in this vibrant, funny drama that takes a thought-provoking look at gender dynamics and consent. Tara (Mia McKenna-Bruce) has a post-GCSE holiday with her friends Em (Enva Lewis) and Skye (Lara Peake), where they get to know the lads in the apartment next door. This one is hotly tipped for the BIFAs and BAFTAs.


Fate unites Dom and Yas

## 3. Rye Lane

**Directed by Raine Allen-Miller**

A joyful romantic comedy set in Peckham, *Rye Lane* is one of the year's most entertaining films. Following two strangers over the course of one day and beyond, it stars Vivian Oparah and David Jonsson, riffing on everything from romcom clichés to art-world pretensions. If you missed it at the cinema, you can catch it on Disney+.

## 4. Blue Jean

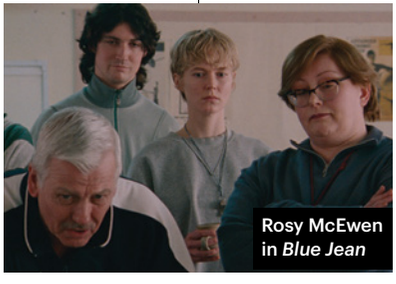
**Directed by Georgia Oakley**

A lesbian PE teacher tries to keep her private life under wraps in Georgia Oakley's award-winning debut starring Rosy McEwen. It's a timely reminder of life in Britain under Section 28, where teachers were forbidden from "promoting homosexuality" — and it's also an entertaining trip back to the 80s.

## 5. Tish

**Directed by Paul Sng**

Tish Murtha was an extraordinary photographer, capturing vivid black-and-white portraits of people in her local community, from children in the street to nights in the pub. This fascinating documentary pays tribute to her work, while also highlighting the challenges for a young working-class woman in the 1970s and 80s.


Rosy McEwen in *Blue Jean*

## 6 Klokkenluider

**Directed by Neil Maskell**

*Kill List* actor Neil Maskell turns writer-director with this smart, darkly funny thriller about a couple of whistleblowers who are in over their heads. Holed up in a safe house with a couple of bodyguards, they wait for a meeting with a British journalist. Slow-moving, but full of character and intrigue.

Flo (Jenna Coleman)

Jacob Elordi in *Saltburn*

## 9 Saltburn

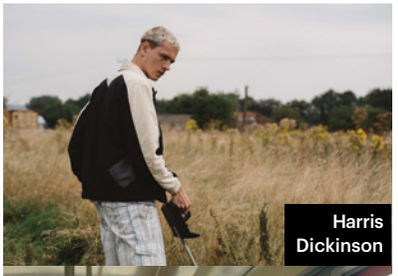
**Directed by Emerald Fennell**

This darkly comic take on class clashes went down a storm at the opening night of the BFI London Film Festival, and it's best enjoyed in a crowd. Barry Keoghan stars as a student who falls into the company of a charismatic posh boy (Jacob Elordi) and his extravagant family. Rosamund Pike, Archie Madekwe, Richard E. Grant and Carey Mulligan co-star.

## 7. Scrapper

**Directed by Charlotte Regan**

Child actress Lola Campbell puts in an extraordinary performance in this charming, imaginative drama about a cheeky 12-year-old who reconnects with her father, played by Harris Dickinson. It's a sweet story told with a fantastical streak and a big heart from debut director Charlotte Regan. Another one to watch out for this film awards season.


Harris Dickinson

Colman and Ward co-star

## 8. The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry

**Directed by Hettie Macdonald**

Jim Broadbent goes on a long walk in this well-crafted weepie based on the book by Rachel Joyce. After discovering his friend is in a hospice, he decides to hike the length of England, and encounters a series of characters along the way. Penelope Wilton is perfectly cast as his wife.

## 10. Empire of Light

**Directed by Sam Mendes**

Olivia Colman puts in a poignant performance in Sam Mendes's film loosely inspired by his childhood. Set in a beautiful old cinema on the coast, it stars Colman as an employee with mental health issues, and Micheal Ward as her new friend. Toby Jones's turn as the avuncular projectionist helps make this a love letter to cinema.

*TYPIST ARTIST PIRATE KING*: © CAMP FILM; *HOW TO HAVE SEX*: MUBI; *RYE LANE*: CHRIS HARRIS/ © 2022 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS; *BLUE JEAN*: PHOTO BY THOMAS WOOD; *KLOKKENLUIDER*: CENTRAL CITY MEDIA; *SCRAPPER*: PICTUREHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT; *SALTBURN*: © AMAZON CONTENT SERVICES LLC; *EMPIRE OF LIGHT*: © 2022 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

Travis tries on the red dress

## 11 Pretty Red Dress

**Directed by Dionne Edwards**

Fragile masculinity is just one of the themes explored in this thought-provoking drama about an ex-convict (Natey Jones) who takes a liking to a sparkly red dress he bought for his partner (Alexandra Burke). Her discovery takes the entire family on a journey full of revelations. A playful blend of grittiness and warmth.

### 12. Girl

**Directed by Adura Onashile**

An arresting debut from British-Nigerian filmmaker Adura Onashile, *Girl* follows a mother and daughter who move from West Africa to Glasgow. The film made a splash when it opened Glasgow Film Festival and explores issues such as integration, loneliness, trauma and parenthood.

### 13. Lola

**Directed by Andrew Legge**

A found-footage sci-fi about two women who build a time-travel machine (sort of), *Lola* has a winning premise. Set during the Second World War, it follows two sisters (Emma Appleton and Stefanie Martini), who discover a way of seeing broadcasts from the future. Their attempts to change fate are initially seen as heroic, but ultimately get them into deep trouble. Uneven, but undeniably fascinating, with lots of Bowie references.

Changing history in *Lola*

### 14. Wham!

**Directed by Chris Smith**

An entertaining documentary about the pop band, this gives an insight into the industry as well as busting a few common misconceptions — one being that George Michael was always the dominant member of the group. With full access to the songs and Andrew Ridgeley, it's a tribute to the memory of both Michael and the band itself.

### 15. The Old Oak

**Directed by Ken Loach**

Ken Loach bows out of the directing game with a typically passionate take on British working-class life. Dave Turner stars as a pub landlord who befriends Syrian immigrants in northeast England. Local tensions rise, but kindness and community spirit prevail in this heartfelt script penned by Loach regular Paul Laverty.

The worse-for-wear pub

### 16. The Great Escaper

**Directed by Oliver Parker**

Michael Caine and the late Glenda Jackson make a fantastic double act in this heartwarming film based on a true story that hit the headlines. Caine plays the chap who gave his nursing home staff the slip to attend the 70th D-Day anniversary in France, while Jackson plays his sharp-witted wife. A little sentimental, but undeniably moving.

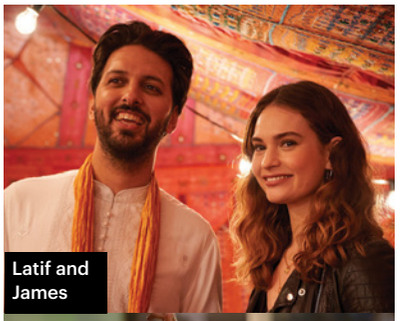
## 17 The Eternal Daughter

**Directed by Joanna Hogg**

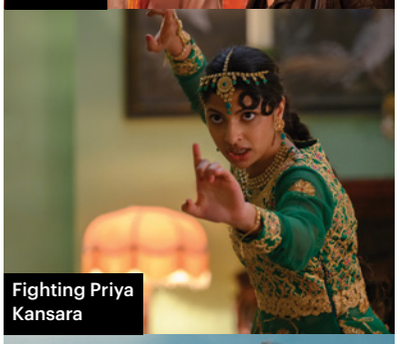
You get two Tilda Swintons for the price of one in this sleek, beautifully acted mystery about a daughter on a hotel trip with her elderly mother (both played by Swinton). With genre trappings and a sense of intrigue, this is a shift of mood for writer-director Joanna Hogg, while coming from a similarly personal place to her work such as *The Souvenir*.

Swinton as the mother

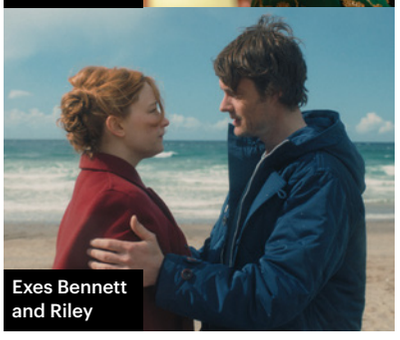
*PRETTY RED DRESS*: AIDEN HARMITT-WILLIAMS; *LOLA*: COWTOWN PICTURES LIMITED; *THE OLD OAK*: JOSS BARRATT/SIXTEEN FILMS; *THE ETERNAL DAUGHTER*: COURTESY OF A24



Latif and James



Fighting Priya Kansara



Exes Bennett and Riley

## 18. What's Love Got to Do with It?

**Directed by Shekhar Kapur**

Lily James and Shazad Latif star in an accessible romcom about a documentary maker who's filming the story of her best friend's arranged marriage. Penned by Jemima Khan and directed by Shekhar Kapur, it's a light and witty watch set in both London and Pakistan.

## 19. Polite Society

**Directed by Nida Manzoor**

Nida Manzoor's spirited action comedy sees a ballsy British-Asian teen trying to prevent her older sister from getting married. Ria Khan (Priya Kansara) has trained herself up in martial arts and puts a plan together with her mates to save her sister. The plot takes some wacky turns but it's certainly never dull.

## 20. She Is Love

**Directed by Jamie Adams**

Haley Bennett and Sam Riley star as divorcees who bump into each other in a hotel, years after they split. He's with his girlfriend, and there are plenty of fraught silences before some poignant and funny moments as they reconnect. Shot during lockdown, it features impressive improv from both actors.

Hair-raising mystery

# 21 Medusa Deluxe

**Directed by Thomas Hardiman**

Possibly the first British murder mystery to be set in the world of competitive hairdressing, *Medusa Deluxe* sees a community divided by the death of a contestant. Star Clare Perkins is terrific fun alongside Anita-Joy Uwajeh, Kayla Meikle and more.

## 22. Otto Baxter: Not A F***ing Horror Story

**Directed by Peter Beard & Bruce Fletcher**

This ground-breaking documentary follows 35-year-old Otto Baxter as he writes and directs his first short film *The Puppet Asylum*, a sweary horror film about a demonic baby. It sees Otto, who has Down's Syndrome, exploring his life and traumas with an imagination and sense of humour. An intriguing film that smashes stereotypes.

# 23 And Then Come the Nightjars

**Directed by Paul Robinson**

The moving story of friendship between a Devon farmer and his veterinary pal, this is based on Bea Roberts' award-winning stage play. A compassionate look at life in the farming community, it's set against the backdrop of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, exploring the devastating effect it had on both livestock and livelihoods.

Down on the farm

*WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?*: ROBERT VIGLASKY; POLITE SOCIETY: PARISA TAGHIZADEH / © 2022 FOCUS FEATURES LLC.; *SHE IS LOVE*: SIGNATURE ENTERTAINMENT; *MEDUSA DELUXE*: COURTESY OF TOM HARDIMAN; *AND THEN COME THE NIGHTJARS*: © FINITE FILMS

# REBEL REBEL

Emotional connection is at the heart of choosing a piece of jewellery either for yourself or a loved one. Full of symbolism and mythology, THOMAS SABO's Rebel at heart collection is all about meaning. The intricate designs of its unisex pieces — made with blackened 925 sterling silver — range from crosses, skulls and falcons to tigers, anchors and now the crocodile. In keeping with the edgy feel, the line features plenty of black onyx stones which inject a much-needed glam-rock vibe. *Thomassabo.com*

KIT WEARS HOOP EARRINGS, £498; (LONGER PENDANT NECKLACE) CROCODILE ROCKS PENDANT, £698, ON VENEZIA CHAIN, FROM £39; (SHORTER PENDANT NECKLACE) BLACKENED SILVER CROCODILE WITH BLACK AND GREEN STONES PENDANT, £598 ON VENEZIA CHAIN, FROM £39; RINGS: (INDEX FINGER) BLACKENED SILVER RING WITH CROCODILE HEAD AND BLACK AND GREEN STONES, FROM £598; (RING FINGER) BLACKENED SILVER CROCODILE RING WITH BLACK AND GREEN STONES, FROM £479

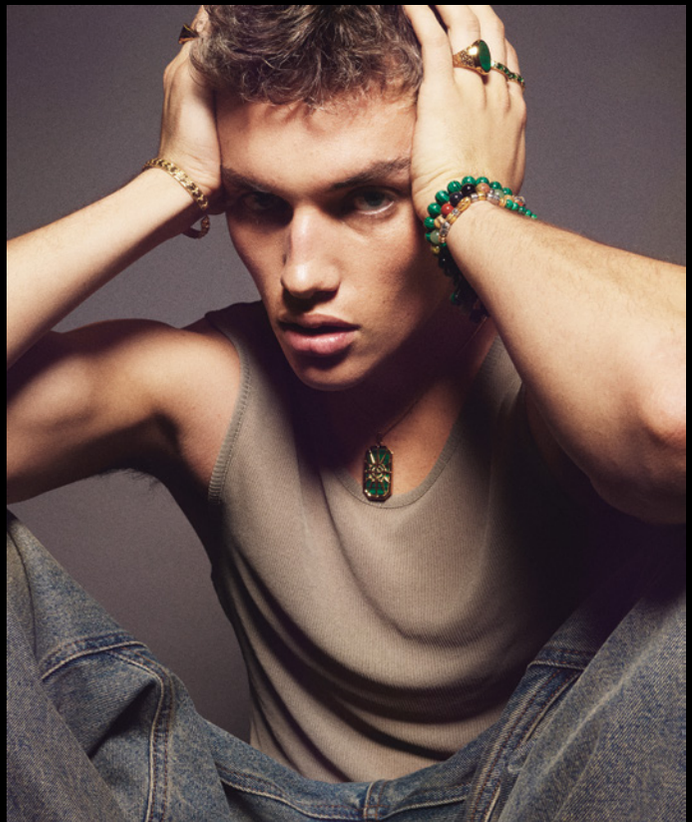
STYLING AND WORDS BY
**JOSEPH KOCHARIAN**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
**MARK CANT**

KIT WEARS RINGS: (INDEX FINGER) BLACKENED SILVER CROWN RING, FROM £279; (MIDDLE FINGER) ORNAMENTS RING, FROM £129; (RING FINGER) BLACK AND SILVER SIGNET RING, FROM £139; NECKLACES: VENEZIA CHAINS, FROM £39

KIT WEARS YELLOW GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER 3D CROCODILE ROCKS PENDANT, £699 ON VENEZIA CHAIN, FROM £98; YELLOW GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER CROCODILE RING, FROM £549

KIT WEARS (SHORT NECKLACE) SWORD NECKLACE, £159; (MIDDLE NECKLACE) ELEMENTS OF NATURE SILVER NECKLACE, £179; (LONGEST NECKLACE) BLACKENED STERLING SILVER SNAKE NECKLACE, £198; BLACKENED SNAKE AND SWORD SET HOOP EARRINGS, £198; RINGS, LEFT HAND: (INDEX FINGER) BLACKENED SILVER CROWN RING, FROM £279; (MIDDLE FINGER) ORNAMENTS RING, FROM £129; (RING FINGER): BLACK AND SILVER SIGNET RING, FROM £139



KIT WEARS GREEN COMPASS STAR PENDANT, £279; RINGS, LEFT HAND: (RING FINGER) GREEN AND GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER SIGNET RING, FROM £298; (MIDDLE FINGER) GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER RING IN CROCODILE DESIGN WITH GREEN STONES, FROM £239; (INDEX FINGER) WIDE GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER RING IN CROCODILE DESIGN AND GREEN STONES,FROM £349; LEFT ARM: GREEN CROSS BRACELET, £159; MULTICOLOURED BRACELET, £89; TWO-TONE LUCKY CHARM BRACELET, FROM £149; RIGHT HAND: CLASSIC GREEN AND GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER SIGNET RING, £198; YELLOW GOLD-PLATED STERLING SILVER SLIM BANGLE WITH CROCODILE DETAILING, FROM £339

KIT WEARS RINGS, LEFT HAND: (INDEX FINGER) BLACKENED SILVER CROWN RING, FROM £279; (MIDDLE FINGER) ORNAMENTS RING, FROM £129; (RING FINGER) CLASSIC TIGER'S EYE SIGNET RING, FROM £139; BLACK ONYX BEADS AND CHAIN LINK BRACELET, £198; RIGHT HAND: (INDEX FINGER) SILVER LINKS RING, FROM £149; (MIDDLE FINGER) TREE OF LOVE RING, FROM £169; VENEZIA BLACKENED SILVER BRACELET, £129; NECKLACES: VENEZIA CHAINS, FROM £39

MODEL: KIT PRICE AT IMG
HAIR AND MAKEUP BY MAYA CZARNECKA USING AESOP
FASHION ASSISTANT: AARON PANDHER

RollingStone UK

# GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

*Make their Christmas wish come true with our stylish, hand-picked gift selection*

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With age-defying skincare and a satin eye mask, this set makes the perfect pampering kit for a loved one.
£95
*medik8.com*

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For the music fan, a comfy cotton sweatshirt bearing the legendary Studios' logos past (above) and present.
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Part of the LV Portrait capsule, the Keepall Bandoulière 25 Bag is a piece of art that also fits all the essentials.

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Volvo EX30

# RS ROAD TEST

**Say hello to the first small car that makes electric accessible, sensible and desirable: Volvo's all-new baby SUV that's as if Apple made motor cars...**

At various points in recent memory, Apple has been the biggest, or at least the most valuable, company in the world. You can point to its leadership, its record of innovation and its mastery of modern communications technology to find the reasons for that.

But others have those things, too: great leaders, innovators and communicators exist in any number of other spheres, and yet Apple they are not. Because, you might venture, nowhere else are any or all of those elements combined with an ability to make industrial design sexy.

The late Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, once said of an iMac that it "looked so good you want to lick it," and while I can't claim to have tasted any of the Apple products that dot my home, it's true that millions of us have been seduced by smooth casings, bejewelled glass surfaces and the tactility of haptics various. As the adage has it — if it looks right, it is right. And if it looks right, you are more likely to desire

it, seek it out and pay a premium for it. Not for nothing is Apple's design guru, Jonathan Ive, lauded by peers and purchasers alike.

Which brings us to the new Volvo EX30. The first-ever small Volvo SUV, but the biggest of ideas within, and an all-electric platform beneath. So far, so good. But then who better to make a small, boxy car than a company that has been making big, boxy cars since God was a boy? You could probably draw it without seeing it, couldn't you?

Except not. Just look at it here, newly unwrapped. It may be small, but it's perfectly formed. At once modern and yet, when placed alongside any number of faceless, aero-moulded EVs being rushed to market, both distinctively Volvo and reassuringly SUV in form. And for reasons I can't quite put my finger on — bar it being intrinsically right, taut surfaces, design detailing and all — unusually desirable.

I know, right? Getting excited about supercars and super-luxe is fair game, but hot under the collar about a baby SUV? I am as confused as you are.

Or maybe not. Because there's more inside. There are four different interior designs, or 'rooms' as Volvo calls them, awash with recycled and renewable materials, shredded plastics from window frames or upcycled denim fibres among them. And the architecture is different in here — there's a home-inspired, dashboard-mounted soundbar, so no need for bulky speakers in the doors, and the car being electric means a sizeable central storage compartment where a transmission tunnel used to be.

It's a nice place in which to ride or steer — clean, uncluttered and unquestionably modern, up to and including the removal of every conceivable button, switch, rotary controller or slider in favour of a central screen that could be one of Apple's finest.

Now, some would say that a multi-menu screen is not intuitive or easily accessed when you want to make a minor adjustment — to heating controls, for example. And it's true that my co-pilot and I were bemused when the music volume, uncomfortably loud, refused to abate because he was unwittingly adjusting the door mirrors via a previous menu. But the reality is that somebody owning this car would learn the interface as they lived with it.

Besides, there are more important things to think about, and admire, on the open road. I spent most of the time driving a mid-level single-motor extended range EX30 in top-flight Ultra trim, and that meant 272bhp in a small SUV that can dash from standstill to 60mph in a nick over five seconds. Which is a bit of a lark, but before you think of hypercar-baiting, the car is limited to 112mph.

Handily, the range of 298 miles on a single charge is above market average, and as Volvo's research suggests typical owners will drive 31 miles a day and have access to home charging, there's no reason for range anxiety.

Or much to get anxious about at all. This baby Volvo steers sweetly, drives smoothly and quietly, turns in crisply and rides calmly – peppy away from the lights; happy just cruising when the mood takes you. And starting at £33,795 (£42,045 as tested), it's very keenly priced against some petrol/diesel old-schoolers that now feel very old indeed.

And there's the rub. If you want a small, thoroughly modern car that — arguably, for the first time — makes electric accessible, sensible and desirable, then the Volvo EX30 is for you. Not least because you'll lock it and look back at it, and love what you see. It is, dare I say it, as if Apple made motor cars. **DARREN STYLES**

**QUICK STATS**

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**TORQUE**
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**0-60MPH**
5.2 SECS
**TOP SPEED**
112MPH
**RANGE**
298 MILES
**PRICE**
£42,045
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# Suggs

## *The Madness frontman on the enduring appeal of their music and keeping things fresh after 40 years in the business*

ARON KLEIN

**The *Theatre of the Absurd Presents C'Est La Vie* is your 13th album. How do you keep enjoying being in the studio when you've been doing it for so long?**

Well, the whole thing has been great. It's been a very bizarre few years, to say the least. When Covid happened, we did nothing for about two and a half years, so just getting back in the room together was pure joy. It was fantastic.

**What's the one thing that keeps bringing you together as a band?**

It's what we've done all our lives, you know what I mean? Certainly, for me since I was 18 years old. I like to think of myself as a working-class person deep down, but really, I've been a pop star for 40-odd years. That's why it hit me so hard during Covid. I was singing at bus stops, and my wife thought I'd lost my mind.

But when we're all in the room together, it's easy because they're all friends of mine. It means that the music is a byproduct of our friendship and that's what has always made it, I think.

**You've said that the latest record reflects the times we're living in and — please excuse the pun — the madness of that.**

Yeah, because it became quite clear that as a society, we didn't agree on everything. Vaccination and lockdown and all that. But in this band, we've always had a tolerance for each other, and everyone gets to have their say because we all write songs. When we get together and make music, that transcends everything else because music is such an amazing thing and a privilege to be involved with.

**What's your take on our polarised times? What's the reason for this?**

Funnily enough, I was reading a rather interesting [article by] Caitlin Moran, and she said that what's really sad is that the middle ground has been burnt to ashes. You know, you have to be on one side or the other, and gone is the idea that you can understand two points of view. With my band, we didn't always agree, but even when we were opposites, we could understand the other person's point of view. I think that's the worst thing. People don't seem to be able to do that anymore. You look and just think, 'Well, surely someone's got to be in the middle?'

**You've lived through this before. Madness were at their peak in the 80s when the Falklands was happening and Thatcher was in charge...**

Yeah, I've seen it a few times! But it does always seem to come back. You mentioned the Falklands, and I remember when you'd get beaten up in a pub if you said you thought that going to war with the Falklands was a stupid idea.

**Madness are such prolific live performers, and you're heading out on the road again this Christmas. What keeps you getting up on stage?**

Money! Thank you, next question. No, I honestly enjoy it, and I think now when I see what Madness create, it's a great thing. My mate called it unbridled joy. You know, when you see people digging what you're doing, you can't not want to do it. It's such a privilege.

**It must also be nice to know your songs have forged an eternal place in the pop pantheon of British music. Your cover of 'It Must Be Love' always ranks as one of the most-played songs at UK weddings.**

You know, I remember very clearly when Mike [Barson, Madness multi-instrumentalist] played 'It Must Be Love' on the piano for the first time, and our record boss said we had to record it. I just said, "'*Nothing more, nothing less*'? Who's gonna fucking wanna hear that?" Now we've taken over from 'I Will Always Love You' by Whitney Houston at weddings and funerals! When I see fat bald blokes all crying to that song, it's a great thing. But the other thing about pop music is that it's so ephemeral. One song could remind you of the first time you snogged a bird. It's three minutes of your life that relates to a very important part of it. Those songs you listened to as a teenager will remain in your heart forever, whatever they might be.

**And finally, who's the maddest person you've ever met?**

George Clinton! We were performing at Coachella, and he was there wearing a golden nappy with his beer belly hanging out and a gold Stetson hat. He just said to me "'Ere, son, there's only three steps up onto that stage, but not everyone can walk them." I'll leave you with that! **NICK REILLY**

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